

**DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL  
UNDERSTANDING OF COACHING FOR  
MANAGERIAL AND LEADERSHIP  
EFFECTIVENESS IN THE MALTESE  
PUBLIC SERVICE**

**Duncan Borg Ellul**

A submission in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Derby for  
the award of the degree of Doctor of Professional Practice

College of Business

University of Derby

November 2022



# Keywords

Awareness, Central Government of Malta, Coaching, Consultancy, Continuous Professional Development, Corruption, Favouritism, GROW, High-Potential Human Capital, Independent Coach Instructors, Leadership Development, Learning, Maltese Public Service, Mentoring, Nepotism, Occupational Sectors, Organisational Culture, Organisational Development, Professional Practice, Return on Investment, Senior Public Officers, Skill Shortages, Succession Planning, Talent Development, Talent Management, Training.

# Foreword

After many years of pursuing opportunities to further my personal and professional interests, I finally gained the chance to complete a Doctor of Professional Practice programme at the University of Derby in the United Kingdom. It has been a life-changing journey, full of sacrifice and opportunities to put into practice what I have learnt. Since the autumn of 2014, I have been equipped with the research tools to enhance my academic understanding, broaden my knowledge, and make my experiential journey more valuable. This study contributes to the researcher's achievement in terms of academic expertise and professional practice development, as well as to the professional practitioner community, policy, and government practice.

This topic is important for informing scholars about the need to open intellectual discussions on public sector coaching and to enrich evidence-based enquiries. Readers will recognise from this study that SPOs (the senior managers of the future) are the ones impacted by the skills gap problem in the Maltese Public Service; hence, this study sought to determine whether coaching could be used as a professional learning opportunity (amongst other active forms of professional development) to help reduce the significant skills gap within the MPS. In this research, I singled out each social phenomenon and provided the causes, explanations and solutions for the problems public officials encounter. The key task was to help Senior Public Officers understand their working practices and consider coaching as an alternative means of improving public service values. This topic relates to the Maltese Central Government, SPOs, policymakers and academic researchers. This research activity has proved to be a useful snapshot of how coaching works in Malta and what work still needs to be done.

I hope my research can guide many public service practitioners and internal coaches. In the case of SPOs, they can produce coaching guidelines and training for new recruits and HIPOs, to improve managerial and leadership effectiveness within the MPS. They can use my research to suggest solutions to their seniors and stakeholders within different sectors. Further local or international researchers who want to build upon my published research can also cite it.

I wish to clarify that I have no political reason for undertaking the research, nor do I vest personal interest. I can honestly say I have stayed committed to my topic throughout and have never regretted undertaking this project. For me, as a researcher, this is the beginning.

# Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed directly or indirectly to this study, particularly public officials and coaches. Their sincerity and candour are greatly appreciated. Without their contribution, this study would not have been possible. I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr Tina Bass and Dr Fred Paterson for their supervision and comments on earlier drafts of the project. Their knowledge, patience and experience enabled me to write up the final stages of this thesis. This work results from many long and constructive discussions. In addition, I would like to thank my former supervisor, Dr Tracey Wond, for awakening my interest in the coaching field and my former examiner, Dr Judith Gill. Thanks also to the chair, Mr Daithi McMahon, who coordinated the process during my viva, and to the internal examiner Professor Qile He (Horace) and external examiner, Dr Andy Coleman.

I would also like to acknowledge my gratitude to the Government of Malta for letting me conduct the study in the Maltese Public Service. I hope this research will promote readiness for a coaching culture in Malta.

I have benefited from the comments and suggestions of my former colleagues and friends: Mr Mario Bugeja, Mr Patrick Cuschieri, Ms Davina Spiteri, Mr Saviour Aquilina, Mr Darrell Pace, Mr Gino Pavia, Mr Raymond Dimech, and Mr Louis Xuereb. Additional thanks go to my superiors, Ms Alexia Vella, Dr Fiona Cilia Pulis, Mr Jesmond Friggieri, and Ms Denise Mizzi, who shared their thoughts and ideas with me and offered their help when I needed it.

Thanks to the Maltese Dominican Priory, Fr Dominic V. Scerri OP, and my courageous friends Mr Jean Vella, Ms Elaine Vella Scicluna, Mr Brian Scicluna, Ms Analise Scicluna, Mr Clive Grech, Mrs Alison Grech, Mr Saviour Vassallo, Ms Daniella Gauci, Ms Charmaine Busuttil, and Mr Manuel Caruana; and Bonavia Offset Printers – Mr Anton Cassar, Mr Neville Cassar and Mr Claude Cassar.

I want to add personal thanks to my partner Rowna, my dad Martin and his partner Joyce, my brother Kurt and his wife Anneliese, and my Nanna Mary and Nannu Fred, whose love and constant support helped me through the most challenging times. Finally, I would like to thank God, who gave me encouragement, moral and emotional support, strength and perseverance, insight, and enough willpower to reach this critical stage in my life, helped by all these unique wonderful people.

With the blessings of my late mother Stella, Nannu Vince and Nanna Yvonne, our late family friend Mr Charles Brincat, and my late admirable teacher Mr Charles Borg (also known as *il-waqu*), I am much in their debt to have completed this phase of my life with complete honour.

# Abstract

This professional doctorate project seeks to determine whether coaching can be used as a professional learning opportunity (amongst other active forms of professional development) to help reduce the significant skills gap within the Maltese Public Service (MPS). This study reveals a strong backdrop of weak leadership development and corruption issues in the MPS, which can be mitigated by coaching.

This investigation is informed by a constructivist interpretive paradigm (people-centred approach) embedded in a pragmatic research paradigm (mixed-methods). Quantitative data was collected using a SurveyMonkey questionnaire from two-hundred and twenty-two (222) Senior Public Officers (SPOs) deployed in the healthcare, finance, ICT and digital media sectors within the MPS. Qualitative data was collected from twenty (20) individuals who offer coaching services in public and private entities; they participated in the study through semi-structured interviews.

Political influence is a barrier to middle managers SPOs in developing the competencies to coach people. There are no coaching programmes for SPOs available within the MPS. Employees are more resistant to coaching than senior managers, and there are barriers to developing a coaching culture within middle-management levels. The only Ministry within the Office of the Prime Minister micro-manages the MPS's day-to-day operations rather than providing clear policy guidance and giving the MPS the tools to do its job. This is embedded in and exacerbated by what seems to be a broader culture of nepotism, corruption, and the 'political' appointment of people to the MPS who are not qualified for their roles. Politicians often control programmes and activities, and most SPOs feel marginalised and less inclined to participate in their personal development. This is compounded by a transactional culture of telling and bullying/mismanagement, resulting in low morale and service effectiveness.

While the study acknowledges deficits in leadership qualities in higher positions within the MPS, it could be inferred from the data that the barriers to developing a coaching culture within the service do not predominantly lie with senior management but in mid-management levels. The study suggests that employees are more resistant to coaching than senior managers. Paradoxically, despite the lack of coach training for SPOs in the Maltese Public Service, coaching practices have found a strong foothold in the professional development and management practices of some SPOs. The Central Government of Malta, however, may need to develop a clear vision of a future MPS and conduct a cost-benefit analysis of different forms of intervention through a comprehensive coach training programme for success in better talent management (TM), leadership development and succession planning (SP) more generally.

As a contribution to practice, the author has developed a conceptual framework model, and a tentative GROW coaching model designed to understand the complex dynamics of the Maltese Public Service.

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# List of Abbreviations

AC	Association for Coaching
AI	Artificial intelligence
APECS	Association of Professional Executive Coaches & Supervisors
CBC	Cognitive Behavioural Coaching
CPD	Continuous professional development
CGM	Central Government of Malta
DC	Developmental coaching
DCS	Director of Corporate Services
DG	Director-General
DPROF	Doctor of Professional Practice
EC	European Commission
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
ETC	Employment and Training Corporation (Jobsplus)
EMCC	European Mentoring and Coaching Council
EU	European Union
HES	Higher executive service
HIPO	High potential
HOD	Head of Department
ICF	International Coaching Federation
ICI	Independent Coach Instructor
INK	Instituut Nederlandse Kwaliteit
IPS	Institute for the Public Service
MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment
MFIN	Ministry for Finance
MJCL	Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government
MPS	Maltese Public Service
MSD	The Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister
OC	Organisational culture
OD	Organisational development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PAA	Public Administration Act
PC	Person-centred
PFC	Performance coaching
PPS	Principal Permanent Secretary
PS	Permanent Secretary
PSC	Public Service Commission
SC	Skills coaching
SES	Senior Executive Service
SF	Solution-focused
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SP	Succession planning
SPO	Senior Public Officer
TD	Talent development
TM	Talent management
TOR	Terms of reference
UOD	University of Derby

# Statement of Original Authorship

The work in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet the requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Student Name and Surname: Duncan Borg Ellul

Date: 06 November 2022

# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

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*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*

—T. S. Eliot

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into eight sections. Section 1.1 is the introduction to the chapter. Section 1.2 outlines the background to the research, followed by section 1.3, which presents the context of the study. Section 1.4 outlines the contribution and rationale of the study, including practitioner motivations and research gaps. This section is followed by the purpose of the study (aims, objectives and research questions) in section 1.5. Section 1.6 provides a methodological overview of the study, and section 1.7 outlines the remaining chapters of the work, with a chapter summary in section 1.8.

The study is conducted in accordance with the Data-Protection Act of Malta Chapter 586 (MJCL, 2018a), the UK Data-Protection Act 2018 (gov.uk, 2018) and the European Union (EU) General Data-Protection Regulation (GDPR) (GDPR.eu, 2016) and subsequent legislation. The study is conducted in accordance with the GDPR principles and the research data: *Code of Conduct on Data Treatment for Research Purposes* (2018), published by the University of Derby (UOD, 2018) (Appendix A).

## 1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

This is a Professional Doctorate Practitioner Project supported by the Central Government of Malta (CGM). As the former Head of the Research Unit Department in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), this researcher was commissioned to conduct a study on the problem of acute skills shortages following the 2017 and 2018 European Commission (EC) reports for Malta (Appendix B). The Research Unit,

which now forms part of the Institute for Public Service (IPS) in Malta, focuses on the administrative and human capital aspects of the Maltese Public Service (MPS) and provides ideas to inform decision-making. The Unit also develops Government policies and initiatives for challenging reforms, projects, and draft legislation. The Unit's research projects rely on the CGM's Terms of Reference (TOR) as a guide to set clear expectations. To guide this project, the TOR issued by the CGM stated:

The Government of Malta is concerned about senior management's working practices and those occupying other executive positions who lack the technical and generic skills, particularly in Health, Finance and ICT and Digital Media occupations. Henceforth, an intervention is being prioritised for a suitable action at a policy level. (Research Unit, OPM, 2018: 4)

Dimech (2008), a Maltese scholar, has shown in his research on the Maltese social work scenario, that a significant problem dominating professional practice in various disciplines in Malta, is the lack of skills and competencies of those holding leadership positions. Although Dimech's pioneering work was conducted fourteen years ago, his research is still valid. This unresolved issue is a social and cultural concern for the CGM, as it can lead to the loss of leadership values within the MPS.

The values of the MPS are enshrined in the Public Administration Act (PAA) (Cap 595), which requires public employees to exercise all powers conferred to them by law and to render services to the public courteously, expeditiously and impartially. Public service employees have a duty to coordinate Government policies with Ministries, Agencies, Government Departments and Local Councils. They are also required to contribute through their own conduct to making their workplace one that recognises talent, develops skills and abilities, performance rewards, avoids discrimination and offers safety (publicservice.gov.mt, 2021a).

It was interesting to note from the researcher's initial observations that the EC reports for Malta examined gaps in the healthcare, finance and ICT sectors, but they failed to discuss individual skills gaps or the under-skilling of leaders. This requires exploration, so this thesis tries to fill this gap. Skills gaps occur when the workforce does not have the skills to fulfil their role (Kenayathulla et al., 2019). Other terms used in the literature include 'skills shortages' and 'skills mismatch.' A particular and unusual

way of defining a skills shortage is when there is reason to believe there is a sufficient supply of individuals with the required skills (both technical and generic); however, they resent working in an environment where their ambitions and expectations are not aligned with their motivational goals (Forbes Council Coaching, 2018). On the other hand, skills mismatch is a term used to describe the discrepancy between the skills sought by employers and the skills individuals possess (McGuinness et al., 2018).

Although these skills ‘deficits’ are usually technical, Woods (2016) reports that, for example, coaching interventions enabled a senior nurse to re-engage with frontline staff despite being well-trained in her field. Woods added that after coaching, the nurse became more resilient, more confident, and better able to deal with problems at work. There was increased team management and cohesion, which seemed to contribute to better patient care. Formal training is also a way to address skill deficits in nursing and other professions. Rather than teaching them new things, as would be the case with training, the workers lead the coaching themselves, using their knowledge and experience to find their own solutions (Sheehan et al., 2018). For example, authors such as Ford (2020) and Marsh (2020) have shown how coaching helped reduce leadership gaps in the healthcare sector during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this thesis, there are two conceivable ways in which coaching can be interwoven within the public service of Malta: (i) coaching to reduce gaps in management and leadership skills and (ii) coaching as professional development. A growing concern is how to retain a workforce capable of meeting the demands of the MPS and providing employees with a professional development path to advance in their careers.

### **1.2.1 Terminology and Definitions**

Many issues highlighted in the coaching literature revolve around what coaching is and how it can be used. International scholars (Hastings & Kane, 2018; Kimball, 2022; Korotov & Bernhardt, 2018) have branded coaching as a customised developmental process in a one-on-one, formal, short-to-medium-term counselling relationship to achieve sustained behaviour development and changes in the coachee. Coaching is also viewed from an analytical perspective as a form of management practice with some training characteristics. Papanthymou and Darra (2019) describe ‘training’ as

imparting professional knowledge so work can be done cooperatively, efficiently and effectively.

The Maltese legislation refers to trade and other professional practices in specific areas, such as psychology and social work, but not coaching. Along with the forms of training already used in social work (Cap. 468, Laws of Malta, MJCL, 2018b) and psychology (Cap. 471, Laws of Malta, MJCL, 2018c) – where much supervision is required – a mixture of coaching qualities is used either to improve poor academic performance (ETC & MEDE, 2015; Jobsplus, 2018) or to provide young job seekers with necessary skills (aġenzija żgħażaġh, 2018).

This blending of different unspecified roles (which fall under the term ‘coaching’) has led to several misunderstandings in the Maltese social and cultural contexts (Cauchi, 2012; Law & Aquilina, 2013; Vella Scicluna, 2015). Although there are many facets of coaching (Appendix C), some literature remains weak and descriptive. A growing body of coaching literature (Graßmann et al., 2020; Lopez, 2017; Minzlaff, 2019) shows how this rich interdisciplinary heritage makes coaching transdisciplinary by incorporating two or more academic disciplines (Colpaert et al., 2018; Preston, 2020).

While some coaching approaches exclude the coach from giving advice (e.g., in mentoring or executive coaching), others still view the coach as a counsellor (Grant & Green, 2018; Wahyuningsih & Sartika, 2020). Throughout this project, the term ‘coach’ does not refer to an ‘expert’ but a ‘facilitator’ of learning. This project aims to increase knowledge about the different forms of coaching in healthcare, finance, ICT and digital media occupations within the public sector environment in Malta. In this study, the terms ‘occupations’ and ‘sectors’ are used interchangeably, as all occupations mentioned fall under the same MPS framework ([Figure 1](#))



Figure 1: Occupational Sectors within the MPS  
(Own source)

Throughout the project, the term ‘MPS’ will continue to refer to the Maltese Public Service, which in a foreign language (or by industry newcomers) is known as ‘the Maltese Public Sector.’ However, in Malta, the public sector is not synonymous with the civil service. The MPS subsumes the public service and those bodies to which the Maltese Constitution gives credence.

The ‘Public Sector’ refers to all government organisations and their employees as distinct from the private sector (private companies, non-government organisations and their employees). The ‘Public Service’ consists of ministries and departments of Government. The Public Service is the core of the Government’s administrative machinery, but this machinery has other components. These include statutory authorities and agencies, Government foundations and companies with a government majority shareholding. These entities are part of the public sector but not the Public Service. The Public Service employs around 30,000 staff, while another 20,000 or so staff are employed by entities in the wider public sector. (publicservice.gov.mt, 2021b)

Evidence suggests that Mediterranean countries consider coaching as a business tool and that it is gradually becoming a recognised profession, but this is not the case for Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and Malta, according to Passmore (2013). In his book *Diversity in Coaching: Working with Gender, Culture, Race and Age*, the same author argues that coaching communities come together to share ideas, continuously learn, and develop a better understanding of coaching best practices. He also points out that many organisations are working towards a similar goal: to enhance the

coaching profession or achieve coaching excellence that is collaborative rather than competitive. Although the contents of the book are nearly ten years old, its conclusions remain valid. A key reason for this is the positive influence integral coaching has on building an individual's embodied competencies, which are needed to connect with the world and find greater satisfaction and purpose in their lives.

### **1.2.2 Structure and Organisation**

Within the MPS, organisational departments are listed in the Second Schedule of the PAA (Cap 595). This Schedule also lists heads of departments (HODs) and other offices with statutory powers (part of the Higher Executive Service (HES)). The PAA also recognises equivalent statutory titles: Director-General (DG, Treasury), for example, is equal to Accountant General (MJCL, 2019). The MPS is also characterised by the following:

- A standard pay structure based on a 'twenty' salary scale 'concentrina' (salary scale 1 is the highest and salary scale 20 is the lowest).
- A typical career structure that lets public officials move from one Ministry or Department to another throughout their careers.
- Common principles for appointments and discipline, governed by the Public Service Commission (PSC).

The PSC is an independent constitutional body that acts as a supervisory authority for appointments and for exercising discipline in Public Service (Malta Public Service, 2020).

Under the PAA, the HES (formerly known as the Senior Executive Service (SES)) consists of HODs; DGs (scale 3); Directors or equivalent positions (scale 4), including Director of Corporate Services (DCS), Policy Development and Implementation Monitoring, Information Management and Assistant Directors / Technical Senior Managers (scale 5). Those holding the positions of Manager II with a master's degree (scale 6), and Manager I (scale 7), are considered middle managers. The difference between Manager I and Manager II is the salary scale and allowances they receive. Managers I and II are mid-level Senior Public Officers (SPOs) and liaise between

senior management and their direct subordinates. More information on the key roles within the MPS is detailed in Appendix D.

Within the MPS, there are also Principals and Senior Principals (junior management/first-line managers). These public officials (formerly civil servants) are below scale 7 and do not hold middle or senior management positions. These public officials were not included in this study, as they are not involved in strategic leadership and decision-making. The main stakeholders in this study are the MPS, SPOs and ICIs. In this study, ICIs refer to Independent Coach Instructors. These coach instructors did not have a direct relationship with SPOs at the time of the study. In this research, both SPOs and ICIs are study subjects. In the quantitative findings and analysis, SPOs will be referred to as respondents, while in the qualitative approach, ICIs will be called participants or interviewees. We now move to the next section, which explains the context of the study.

### **1.3 CONTEXT**

This section is divided into three parts; the first part will provide some background information regarding Malta and the Maltese economy (subsection 1.3.1). The second part will discuss cultural nepotism and the Maltese political brain drain (subsection 1.3.2). The last part will address the main issues related to coaching, talent development (TD) and professional mobility (subsection 1.3.3).

#### **1.3.1 Malta and the Maltese Economy**

The Republic of Malta (also known as the Maltese Islands) is a Southern European country – an archipelago of five islands in the Mediterranean Sea, with about 533,286 inhabitants. Malta is the largest island, followed by Gozo, Comino, Cemunett and Filfla. The latter two are uninhabited islets. With an area of 316 m<sup>2</sup>, Malta is one of the smallest states in the EU; the distance between Malta and the nearest point on the North African mainland is 288 km (NSO Malta, 2020). Most of the population (97%) belongs to the Roman Catholic Church, which is enshrined by law as the state religion, though there is complete freedom of conscience and religion.

Following WWII, the political environment was split between those who sought complete integration with the United Kingdom and those who wanted independence. Malta declared independence from the United Kingdom on 21 September 1964 and subsequently joined the Commonwealth. Malta became a republic on 13 December 1974, although it remained reliant on the British military and naval station until 1979 (gov.mt, 2018). Malta became a member of the EU in 2004, and the euro (EUR) replaced the Maltese lira (MTL) as Malta's official currency in 2008, with an irreversible exchange rate of 0.4293 MTL for one euro. Due to this success, the nation has become more market-oriented, with growing participation in higher-value-added economic industries (Finance Malta, 2018; Visit Malta, 2018).

Malta bases its economy on advanced manufacturing, aviation, education and training, finance, healthcare, ICT, shipping, and logistics (Finance Malta, 2018; Malta Enterprise, 2017; Visit Malta, 2018). With the recent introduction of the blockchain (Deloitte Malta, 2019) and artificial intelligence (AI) (Malta Independent, 2019), Malta has opened itself up to more investment in the finance and technology sectors. Malta boasts a pleasant environment, a hardworking workforce and a stable economy that provides full employment (including 45,000 international workers) (Finance Malta, 2018; Visit Malta, 2018). Unfortunately, the COVID-19 outbreak in Malta in 2020, like in other EU and non-EU nations, has resulted in significant long-term economic damage (Malta Independent, 2020). Amid the epidemic, the Maltese Government, like many others throughout the globe, has been attempting to rebuild the country's economy.

### **1.3.2 Cultural Nepotism and the Maltese Political Brain Drain**

Malta is seen as the most corrupt country in Western Europe (Watson, 2019). Following the murder in 2017 of Daphne Caruana Galizia (a Maltese journalist with a high reputation for investigative journalism) and the triggering of 'Daphne's Project', there have been vociferous calls to impose the rule of law from the opposition party and non-profit organisations (Borg, 2018; Camilleri, 2021; Malta Independent, 2018; Reuters, 2017). The late Ms Caruana Galizia was a tough operator, relentlessly abrasive in her pursuit of wrongdoers. She had spent years exposing corruption and nepotism among the Maltese elite. This strongly indicates there are serious and deep-

rooted problems within the Maltese society. An incident of this nature raises questions about the governance of a nation and runs counter to what Plutarch alludes to:

...the entry into public life out of the right political choice, to serve the public interest and not by accident or out of ambition and desire for profit, with good education and a built-in law implanted in him by philosophy, a striving for virtuousness and respect for the deities. (as cited in de Blois, 2004:57)

This researcher feels that Plutarch's views relate to the issues discussed in this thesis, particularly on corruption, nepotism and favouritism. The researcher refers to Plutarch for the lessons he taught about the benefits and pitfalls of a popular government and how one should act in public office.

It is clear from the available literature that Maltese politics displays far too many features of tribal politics (Cassar & Munro, 2018). Tribes value the loyalty of their members more than citizenship; their members identify more with a leader than with an institution (Belschak et al., 2018; Ladyshevsky & Litten, 2021; Scott, 2020). They form networks that distribute assets, material goods and interpersonal services. This is clear in the ever-increasing tendency to fill major state offices with partisans, in the fact that recruitment to public organisations is aligned with election cycles, and in the increasing allegations of corruption, hostility and factions (Cassar & Munro, 2018).

In Maltese, hostility is known as *pika*, while factions are called *partiti*. *Pika* signifies competition, ill feelings, or hostility. The term 'faction' is sometimes used broadly to denote a variety of groups with varying degrees of structural complexity (Cassar & Munro, 2018). *Pika* and *partiti* have long characterised Maltese politics. A *partit* (party) is a group that supports one person or policy in competition with a rival group that helps another person or policy. *Festas* (fiestas) are the leading popular entertainment in the countryside, and a village's reputation depends on its ability to host a luxurious feast. *Festa-partiti* are groups of a higher structural order; while they began as groups, they now show many corporate elements (permanence, joint ownership, regular meetings, elected officers, etc.). Many other ideological and social groups exist across the island, hidden to keep their acts from becoming publicly known (Agius, 2020; Briguglio, 2019; Watson, 2019).

Further, Greco (2019) claims that in Malta, it is ‘who you know, not what you know’ that matters most to advance in one’s career. This issue was discussed in the PSC Annual Report of 2011. The report highlights that appointments in the public service of Malta are based on nepotism and favouritism rather than merit and that appointments and promotions are subject to ruling party affiliation and sympathy. This may create concerns regarding competence issues and the manipulation of public institutions. For example, the following clause, as outlined in the Maltese Constitution, gives the Prime Minister or other Ministers absolute power to appoint whomever they want, with the consent of the President of Malta.

Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the President, acting following the advice of the Prime Minister, may, by directions in writing, assign to the Prime Minister or any other Minister responsibility for any business of the Government of Malta, including the administration of any department of Government Constitution of Malta, allocation of portfolios to Ministers. (Amended by LVIII.1974.3, MJCL, 2018d)

As Greco (2019) claims, Maltese politicians and the local Central Government exchange political loyalty with confidants in return for favours or positions within the public service. Successive governments have made several attempts to politicise the public service. This is evidenced in the appointment of staff in higher-rank positions within the service due to nepotism (Dimech, 2008; Ganado, 2017a, b; Glenn, 2012; Micallef, 2017). Although a recent study (Watson, 2019) suggests that nepotism invalidates the very purpose of coaching and TD, as it could devalue the validity and opinion of public officials and coaching leaders, this topic remains open to debate.

### **1.3.3 Coaching, Talent Development and Professional Mobility**

Every paper written on coaching includes a section on TD (e.g., Roberts et al., 2019; Subotnik et al., 2021). This has been the inspiration and starting point for the research. In this study, coaching was an important concept of the TD process, as many researchers in Malta have proved that TD is more popular than coaching. TD is a process that encompasses four broad areas: (i) identification (whom to develop), (ii) design (the competencies to develop people at their own pace during their employment trajectory), (iii) evaluation (measuring effectiveness), and (iv) organisational

management support (Garavan et al., 2012). This researcher explored the talent literature (Appendix E) before looking at coaching-related topics and presented an overview of the literature related to the work presented in this thesis. While TD in Malta is a growing field (Cauchi, 2012; Law & Aquilina, 2013; Vella Scicluna, 2015), Maltese publications on coaching remain few.

In her seminal paper entitled ‘The Model of Knowledge, Talent, Wisdom and Personal Competencies Development’, Figurska and Blašková (2015) identified approaches that guide the reader to the critical aspects of TD that seem to work in different countries and different organisational and cultural settings. This paper covers knowledge of skills, wisdom, talent, talent management (TM) and personality competencies development, whose characteristics consist of three closed segments. The authors have explored the interconnections between these segments and have suggested that to fulfil the potential of the presented model, one needs to consider all individual internal conditions (work organisation, cultural, motivational system, a system of management, links between knowledge management and TM in the organisation, the establishment of a system for support, etc.). In addition, these authors recommended paying attention to individual external conditions (family, life objectives and mission fortune) and respecting and sensibly using external organisational conditions (customers, competitors, employers, labour legislation, and protection of intellectual property rights). According to Figurska and Blašková (2015), acceptance of these conditions and effects will support personality growth and the use of talent, skills and wisdom in a modern organisation.

Considering skills and wisdom as a talent is a slightly different approach. This is because skill is empowered by knowledge, and wisdom is empowered by skill (Selasih & Sudarsana, 2018). As a response to *changing skills needs* executed in countries such as France, Italy, Spain, South Africa and the United Kingdom, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recognised the importance of adult-learning systems (OECD, 2017) that offer a wide range of benefits (Appendix F). While praising such systems, their adoption may be used in other countries such as Malta. Adult-learning is discussed further in section 2.4.3.

Notable studies (Finkelstein et al., 2018; Kwon & Jang, 2021) have tried to explain that TD is firm-specific, while coaching is a complex, idiosyncratic phenomenon required to develop high-potentials (HIPOs) through leadership coaching and development programmes. Such programmes are essential for personal and professional growth (Subotnik et al., 2021; van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). As Stinebaugh (2021) suggests, HIPOs are individuals with the potential, ability and aspiration to assume successive leadership positions through professional mobility.

Professional mobility allows an individual to move up the corporate ladder into a different position, which can be in the same organisation or a different company. The rapid digital revolution and the rise of a new generation of professionals are helping accelerate the upward mobility trend further. Professional mobility can help employers see where the talent lies whilst helping candidates acquire relevant skills. Bersin (2017) describes professional mobility as a dynamic internal organisational process in which talent at leadership, operational and technical levels is moved from one place to another. Dimech (2008) argues that:

the Maltese scenario mirrors Jordan's (2003) findings that with ever-increasing social, organisational and political transformations, there has been a shift that promotes mobility between organisations, communities and countries for the sake of specific economic advantages rather than because of shared values or cultural commitments. (Jordan, 2003: 2, cited by Dimech, 2008).

There are three kinds of professional mobility: geographical, internal, and external. Geographical mobility refers to the ability to assess an employee's willingness and ability to move to find better or new employment. It is determined by several variables, including transportation alternatives, legislation, and living conditions (Issahaka & Lines, 2020; Wright et al., 2018). In terms of advancing within an organisation, career mobility coaching may help professionals transition to their new positions as smoothly as possible. The success of employee career mobility programmes depends directly on informal and non-formal learning processes, which ensure that the provision of higher and further education is aligned with the skills needed for the labour market (OECD, 2017). Continuous professional development (CPD) and internal training ensure that talent retention is part of an internal competency management strategy (George, 2015; Macdonald, 2018).

Internal training offers its participants a wide range of advantages. For instance, the employee will be familiar with the organisation, its structure, and the workplace; this leaves more time for changes and the stress of starting a new structure decrease (Ono, 2018). Blended in-house training may significantly improve an organisation's performance and is integral to any comprehensive employer branding plan. Employees become more loyal and open-minded at work, the organisation will eliminate onboarding errors, and new employees can more quickly adopt the company's culture (Osadcha et al., 2021). By providing employees with the resources to improve their skills and the opportunity to move within the organisation, the employer can develop a strong and engaged workforce and foster employee growth through internal training opportunities and internal mobility.

While we learn from the literature that internal mobility is the movement of employees within an organisation, external mobility refers to transferring personnel in and out of an organisation. It is sometimes referred to as the company's staff turnover rate (Koo et al., 2020). External mobility influences how existing employees leave the company and how new ones join (Privalko, 2019). Most firms fail to recognise the most promising potential; even though attracting external talent is essential for strengthening the company's growth, talent will go unnoticed. An employer's inability to realise the full potential of their workforce can lead these workers to consider moving to greener pastures and may even force them to look for work elsewhere (Sarabi et al., 2018).

The development of talent, whether it takes place in person or electronically, enables a smooth and uncomplicated transfer. Through discussions, the coach may use different coaching techniques to train and improve the coachee's interpersonal skills. The benefits of coaching in promoting professional mobility include giving meaning to professional life, understanding changes in the company's objectives, fostering motivation at work, developing the soft skills required for a new job, managing stress, and bringing about change (Osadcha et al., 2021; Privalko, 2019).

Maltese scholars (Ganado, 2017a, b; Glenn, 2012; Micallef, 2017) suggest that problems associated with professional mobility in the MPS affect TD and contribute to broader problems associated with TM, which exacerbate the skills gap. This is an active and burgeoning area of research. TM refers to the anticipation of required human

capital for an organisation and the planning to meet those needs (Ansar & Baloch, 2018; Kravariti & Johnston, 2020). This has become a strategic necessity, as many organisations have experienced the so-called ‘war for talent’ (Kwon & Jang, 2021; Nilsson et al., 2019). Malta’s ‘war for talent’ involves an ageing population, globalisation, the expansion of cultural and political nepotism from the local settings and changing expectations of flexible working arrangements. In line with the advanced knowledge economy, the sustainability and success of MPS depend on having the right people with the right skills, behaviours and professional values at work. Professional values and leadership are central to this – which is why this thesis will explore the potential of coaching as an approach to systematic TD and to closing or reducing the skills gap within the MPS (Chapters 4 and 5, research question 1, theme 3).

#### **1.4 CONTRIBUTION OF AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

What justifies this thesis as a doctorate is its originality and its significant contribution to knowledge within the Maltese public sector environment. This project offers new knowledge and application of a novel theory that provides more insights to improve the culture, address professional weaknesses, and provide better direction in this neglected area.

This thesis aims to unravel the mysteries surrounding coaching by (i) determining whether coaching can help reduce the significant gap in skills within the MPS; (ii) increasing understanding and awareness of coaching’s contribution to the practices of Maltese SPOs and ICIs; and (iii) enhancing Maltese SPOs’ understanding of coaching as a form of professional development (PD).

Among the accumulated literature, the authors with the strongest influence in the coaching field are Witherspoon and White (1996); Peltier (2011); Wilson (2012); Visser (2012); Passmore (2013); Cox et al. (2014); Connor and Pokora (2017); Gibbons et al., (2017); and Jackson and Cox (2020). These researchers have provided a wealth of information on validating competency frameworks for coaching, training, and other PD. They informed this study by encouraging this researcher to investigate: (i) whether existing coaching practices can help coaching leaders navigate their organisational culture (OC); and (ii) whether coaching can improve the effectiveness

of management and leadership in organisations. Maltese scholars such as Ganado (2017a, b), Glenn (2012) and Micallef (2017) had the most significant impact on the specific sub-niche that involves the Maltese political aspects and public leadership.

What Maltese researchers explored in earlier studies was the blending of coaching approaches from the field of social work and psychology (see section 1.2.1, p. 4). Despite the recognition of coaching in public and private organisations worldwide, few local researchers were interested in conducting similar coaching studies. Thus, there is insufficient literature on coaching in Malta, particularly in the public sector. This researcher compared and conceptualised the various authors' contributions and identified the key debates in the literature review. He drew on concepts he was already familiar with and identified valuable clues to understand the challenges of the MPS better.

The expanding popularity of the term 'coaching' is based on a shared identity. As the literature (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2020; Lai & Smith, 2021) suggests, coaching attempts to help people and organisations become more prosperous. The academic literature on coaching has revealed the emergence of several contrasting themes. Common themes previously discussed in the literature were the coach-client relationship, the coaching process, coaching outcomes, coaching practices, and teaching theories (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2020; Lai & Smith, 2021). The search for themes in this study was relatively straightforward, and the common themes discussed were: 'diversity in coaching' and 'organisational culture', 'leadership' and 'executive coaching', 'learning theories' and 'managerial effectiveness'.

While this researcher was exploring the literature and collecting the data, he identified uncertainties in the leadership channels, and his research shifted to explore this topic further. Aside from the aspects of management and organisational failings, the most surprising discovery was the extent of political corruption, nepotism and favouritism (which indirectly link to the skills gap), which have led the MPS to mediocre talent appointments. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no similar research has been conducted to date.

This researcher focused on a section of this topic small enough to be manageable. Through conversations with Maltese scholars, this researcher gained access to a more advanced level of knowledge. Further access was gained through peers, advisors, university supervisors and government officials. During this investigation, the researcher found areas where he could delve deeper into the subject; and when there were discrepancies among the findings, this researcher collected further data that let him evaluate the work with new critical insights.

The idea that binds this thesis together is that SPOs (the senior managers of the future) are the ones impacted by the skills gap problem in the MPS, and this researcher sought to determine if coaching could help fill the gap in management and leadership skills within the MPS. The main task was to help SPOs understand their working practices and consider coaching an alternative means of improving public service values. During his research, the author not only sampled SPOs for their views but also examined the perceptions of ICIs. This idea was pivotal because he genuinely believes that the coach's role is multifaceted and that understanding the process of coach development is vital for educating the next generation of coach leaders – particularly in enhancing the public sector environment.

As a contribution to practice, this researcher developed a conceptual framework model, which is illustrated in Chapter 5 (p. 190), with a tentative GROW coaching model in Chapter 6 (p. 236), adapted from J. Whitmore's GROW model (Figure 27) to suit the context of the MPS. The researcher developed this model to enhance coaching learning and government practice within the public service of Malta.

This research can lay the groundwork for coaching development, should it be institutionalised and regulated, as has been the case for other Maltese professions in social work and psychology. This study attempts to provide a knowledge base that will enable policymakers to understand the role and function of coaching and to minimise the implementation of a 'one size fits all' approach.

### **1.4.1 Practitioner Motivations**

The practitioner's motivation for this research is twofold. First, this researcher was motivated and inspired by his drive and interest to learn as a practitioner working within the MPS. Second, while sifting through the talent literature, the author encountered topics that inspired him to explore the coaching phenomenon.

As the title suggests, this work is based on the conceptual understanding of coaching for managerial and leadership effectiveness in the MPS, the topic the researcher enjoyed the most during his studies. Although fascinated by the coaching discipline, this researcher is also interested in developing people's skills/talents and cultures within organisations. Due to these interests, this researcher was enthusiastic about producing a Doctor of Professional Practice (DProf) thesis on a topic that unites his passions. The findings of this study will be useful for practitioners working in the MPS as well as other organisations interested in implementing coaching within their own context.

### **1.4.2 Research Gaps**

The gaps found in the literature are methodological, conceptual, and epistemological. This study aims to fill these gaps by identifying the competencies needed to improve management and leadership effectiveness within the MPS. As we have seen in subsection 1.2.1, p. 5, coaching is gradually becoming a recognised profession in European countries; this, however, does not apply to Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and Malta (Passmore, 2013). For many years, the coaching phenomenon was neglected by Maltese scholars, who did not deal with studying it from an individual developmental perspective. Instead, they focused on the benefits that such a coaching discipline could bring to their respective fields. These challenges call for ongoing research efforts.

Further, although currently there are several national and international coaching frameworks and qualification systems to raise standards in the industry (e.g., the Association of Coaching (AC), International Coaching Federation (ICF), European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC)), some international scholars remain sceptical (Fontannaz, 2018; Lyle & Cushion, 2017). For example, the coaching literature mentions that several organisations around the world regard coaching

qualifications as unnecessary. Even coaches themselves seem to believe that there is no qualification needed to coach people (Sim & Lee, 2018; Webb, 2020).

Coaching has received scant attention in the Maltese literature, particularly within the MPS. An area this researcher was eager to explore, along with how coaching can fit into the MPS, is the issues related to skills gaps, management and organisational failings, and the politicised nature of senior and middle-management positions in the service. Investigating these ongoing concerns within the Maltese public settings provides the framework for this study, which builds on existing coaching research. This researcher believes this study is a step in this direction and hopes that public practitioners can demonstrate their managerial and leadership development skills efficiently and effectively through this and further coaching research.

## **1.5 AIM, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **1.5.1 Aim**

This thesis aims to determine whether coaching can be used as a professional learning opportunity (amongst other active forms of PD) to help reduce the significant gap in skills within the MPS.

### **1.5.2 Objectives**

The following five objectives have been pursued throughout the research. Specifically, this study is intended to:

1. Summarise the skills gap in the MPS and identify which subset of these might be addressed by coaching.
2. Establish what understandings of the different types of coaching already exist within the MPS.
3. Develop an understanding of how coaching is perceived amongst practitioners in Malta (SPOs and ICIs).
4. Identify the competencies that SPOs have already gained from coaching support.
5. Draw recommendations for the CGM's consideration to improve managerial and leadership effectiveness within the MPS.

### 1.5.3 Research Questions

The research questions emerged from the conceptual and theoretical framework developed in the literature review and the methodology of choice. In the philosophy of pragmatism, research questions are essential determinants and involve mixed methods to gain new insights (Alabdali, 2020; Bengtsson, 2016). According to Bengtsson (2016), five fundamental criteria should be addressed while developing research questions:

- 1) What the study aims to accomplish.
- 2) The sample and unit of analysis to be used.
- 3) The data collection approach.
- 4) The data analysis approach.
- 5) The results' practical application.

After reading more about the subject in the scientific literature, this researcher considered several options, revising the research questions multiple times. As he scoured the literature and collected the data, uncertainties in the leadership channels were identified, and his research adjusted to explore them further. The questions posed in this project consider and determine what coaching evidence is relevant and how academics view various aspects of coaching as PD. Three fundamental questions were identified based on this research, and the conceptual and theoretical framework (section 2.2) developed from the literature review.

- **Research question 1:** Can coaching contribute to closing the management and leadership skills gap in the Maltese Public Service?
- **Research question 2:** What awareness or understanding of coaching practices do Maltese SPOs and coaches have?
- **Research question 3:** What views do Maltese SPOs have about coaching as a form of professional development?

To recap, this chapter has presented sections that cover the background to the research (section 1.2), the context (section 1.3) and the contribution of the study (section 1.4). Then it has explained the purpose of the study (section 1.5), including aims, objectives and research questions. The following section (section 1.6) briefly provides the methodological overview of the study.

## 1.6 METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

A mixed-methods approach was used in this study to resolve the opposing and conflicting viewpoints of the positivist (quantitative) and interpretative (qualitative) paradigms (Almeida, 2018; Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2020). Quantitative data was collected from two-hundred and twenty-two (222) SPOs working in the health, finance, and ICT and digital media sectors within the MPS through online SurveyMonkey questionnaires. In line with the chosen methods, qualitative data were collected from twenty (20) ICIs through semi-structured interviews. Desktop research methods were also used to support the primary research findings. This researcher combined two data collection approaches (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) to strengthen the reliability and validity of the study.

This project, like any other, examined the validity and reliability of the study. Reliability is how consistently a measurement process delivers the same result (Quintão et al., 2020). Validity is how well the study results reflect the reality of the phenomenon being studied. Rather than a ‘truth’ that can be proven, this investigation yields a potential insight or knowledge of the truth of a particular phenomenon (Ahlin, 2019). Narratives developed by ICIs during the interviews included responses comparable to those found in the online survey; however, SPOs offered extensive and comprehensive explanations of their working procedures within the MPS.

To ensure the instruments’ validity, this researcher piloted the questionnaires to incorporate the desired changes before the actual data collection. The study sought the opinion of test volunteers to measure content validity by asking questions covering different aspects of the construct of interest (relevant to this topic). This helped in making corrections to the instruments before collecting data. Construct validity was also evaluated to determine whether the questionnaires obtained the intended information, such as skills/abilities (understanding of coaching).

The testing volunteers comprised fifteen (15) SPOs who are experts in their field and employed by the IPS. In addition, the researcher involved two trainers who are not employed in the public service but have experience in delivering training to Maltese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This researcher has also requested the

help of an outside academic advisor and a veteran public official who contributed to this research. Informants and the researcher exchanged perspectives on several aspects of the project, such as organisational management, thesis structure, subject areas, etc. The pilot study results were then compared to the literature to ensure validity.

In mixed-methods research, researchers need to test and show that their studies are credible in quantitative and qualitative approaches. Whilst credibility in quantitative research depends on the research instrument, ‘the researcher is the instrument’ in qualitative research (Gagani, 2019). The present study identified several mixed-methods articles that could serve as a guide.

The research questions were based on the premise of the experiences of SPOs and ICIs, as understood and interpreted by this researcher. SPO participants (middle managers) were identified through government networks, while ICIs were selected and recruited through LinkedIn – a social networking site that allows users to create virtual professional profiles that include their work experience, skills, certifications and achievements (Zide et al., 2014).

Face-to-face interviews were recorded and noted in writing. The findings were justified by outlining or showing the steps by which the researcher’s interpretations were arrived at. Theories that might contradict the findings were highlighted to provide alternative explanations or a better understanding of the phenomena.

A member check, also known as informant feedback or respondent validation, is a research approach that helps researchers improve the accuracy of their results in terms of credibility, validity, and transferability (also known as applicability, internal validity, or suitability). The researcher used member checking for the qualitative data, as suggested by Ghafouri and Ofoghi (2016).

Participants were provided with a copy of the transcribed interviews to verify the accuracy of the material. Participants could add to their interview transcript and discuss any parts of the interview they did not wish to be used for interpretation in this research. The researcher listened to the recordings multiple times and read the

transcripts to ensure greater reliability. This researcher triangulated one set of results with another, thereby improving the validity of inferences. A complete record of activities was kept in a personal journal throughout the study; this included correspondence, interview transcripts, coding, and data analysis.

## 1.7 THESIS OUTLINE

- Chapter I (Introduction to The Study)** The introductory chapter begins on page 1; it describes the background and context of the study; outlines the contribution of and rationale for conducting the research, the motivation for the study, and research gaps (coach training as part of better talent management, leadership development and succession planning introduced as possible solutions substantiated by literature). This chapter addresses the purpose of the study; aims and objectives are presented, with the main research questions, a brief outline of the methodology used, and a description of the leading project phases. This chapter provides a transition to Chapter 2.
- Chapter II (Literature Review)** The literature reviewed in this chapter is purely academic, topic-related, and drawn from highly respected professional British, Maltese, and American sources. A narrative account of the literature review starts on page 25; it provides a theoretical and conceptual framework as a possible basis for this work and a review of the relevant literature. It focuses on the historical and international context of coaching (page 29), the diversity in coaching and organisational culture (page 35), including leadership, learning aspects, models, and approaches to coaching. The role and impact of executive coaching are explored (page 70), and gaps in the literature are identified to underpin this work. This chapter provides a transition to Chapter 3.
- Chapter III (Methodology)** The third chapter situates the research within an ontological and epistemological paradigm. The Methodology starts on page 84. It discusses the philosophies that underpin this research, which fit within the interpretivist paradigm; it presents the research design for the study; justifies the research paradigm, strategy and methods,

specifically the mixed-methods methodology, and outlines the research methods considered and rejected; it describes the target population and sample, and anticipates the ethical issues and values discussed in this research and the procedures followed. This chapter also considered the development and testing of the data collection instruments: (1) an online questionnaire and (2) semi-structured interviews. Data collection is discussed on page 107, followed by data management, security and destruction, and data analysis. The strategies used to achieve trustworthiness are presented on page 111, along with the role of the researcher in this research. The chapter concludes with the risks and limitations and provides a transition to Chapter 4.

#### **Chapter IV (Findings)**

The fourth chapter describes the themes identified from the sample and the detailed findings of the research. It provides both a written and a graphical summary of the findings. Findings start on page 124; the chapter presents the results from the phase 1 survey and phase 2 interviews; the use of thematic content analysis to address the research questions directly; and utilising indicative and inferential statistics to present the results. This chapter provides a transition to Chapter 5.

#### **Chapter V (Analysis)**

The fifth chapter discusses the findings that relate to the existing body of research. The discussion starts on page 184. It relates the results to the existing literature. It provides a reflection on the principles of interpretive research and the methods of the mixed-methods approach. It presents a detailed analysis and discussion of the quantitative and qualitative data; formulates a conceptual framework model to enhance coaching learning and government practice within the public service of Malta; synthesises the themes; returns to the literature to compare with the work of others.

#### **Chapter VI (Conclusion)**

The concluding chapter starts on page 224. This chapter revisits the aims, objectives and research questions and summarises the main findings. The research contributions to knowledge and practice will be discussed, along with the research implications. A set of recommendations for MPS will be proposed,

highlighting future directions for related research. This chapter concludes with a personal reflection and insights about double-loop learning covering the theoretical aspects and the coaching experience of the researcher.

**References, Bibliography and Appendices**

References cited start on page 251; presents the bibliography on page 291 along with the appendices on page 294.

**1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This introductory chapter has provided the background and context of the study. A broad overview of the primary literature was presented, followed by the study's contribution to knowledge. The aims, objectives and research questions derived from the gap analysis were explained, and an overview of the methodology was exhibited. The following chapter is a narrative account of the literature review, aiming to acknowledge the sources used in the subject under study.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

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*Knowing others is intelligence.*

*Knowing yourself is true wisdom.*

*Mastering others is a strength.*

*Mastering yourself is true power.*

—Lao-Tzu

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

There are many types of literature reviews (see Lim et al., 2022), but the two most common in the scientific literature are (i) systematic reviews and (ii) narrative reviews. A *systematic review* is a well-planned review that uses a systematic and defined approach to find, select, and critically evaluate the results of studies in the literature review (Hiebl, 2021). However, this researcher conducted a *narrative review* of the literature. Unlike a traditional literature review, which simply summarises and critiques the existing research on a topic, a narrative review also tells a story about the state of the field. In doing so, it helps to situate the existing research in a broader context and provides insights into future directions for research. Although narrative reviews are often used in the social sciences, they can be helpful in any field where there is a need to synthesise a large body of research. When done well, researchers can provide a clear and concise overview of a complex topic that is easy for readers to follow (Juntunen & Lehenkari, 2021).

This chapter is divided into six sections. Section 2.1 is the introduction to the chapter. The second deals with the theoretical and conceptual framework (2.2) upon which the study is based, while the third deals with the historical and international context of coaching (2.3). The fourth section describes the diversity of coaching concepts (2.4), including leadership, learning aspects, models and approaches used to study coaching and organisational culture (OC). The fifth section concludes by acknowledging the role and impact of executive coaching in research and practice (2.5), with a chapter summary in section 2.6.

## 2.2 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section of the literature review presents the theoretical and conceptual framework associated with all the aims and objectives set in this research. As discussed in Chapter 1, section 1.2, p.2, one of the main challenges the Central Government of Malta (CGM) faces is that Senior Public Officers (SPOs) are hampered by a lack of technical and generic skills in low-skilled areas.

The conceptual framework was developed based on the research questions and a review of existing studies and theories on the subject under investigation. Important variables (study features) were then isolated and linked to the aims and objectives of this study. This researcher decided on which variables are related to one another. In this study, two variables were closely analysed: (i) skills shortages associated with retention challenges and organisational and management failings (dependent variable); (ii) the impact of coaching (amongst other active forms of PD) as a professional learning opportunity (independent variable).

This researcher considered a handful of prominent papers and sought to identify how the themes fit together and relate to each other in a logical sequence, to address the aim and objectives of the study, including the research questions. Supervisors and local researchers were consulted to ensure the author missed no relevant information. This literature review included a critical examination of papers published in books, journals, and electronic and print journal articles. However, the literature that was reviewed for the preparation of this research study uncovered little evidence about what lies beneath its surface. All related articles listed in Appendix G have been reviewed as relevant sources. The literature search was carried out in various databases, such as the UK Library Catalogue, Dawsonera, EbscoHost, Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, UDORA, and other online management journals; dissertations related to management and public policy; and various Internet sites, such as Harvard Business Review online. Following this, a graphical representation ([Figure 2](#)) was created, consisting of three main gears, namely: i) economic lens, (ii) coaching lens, and (iii) sector lens.

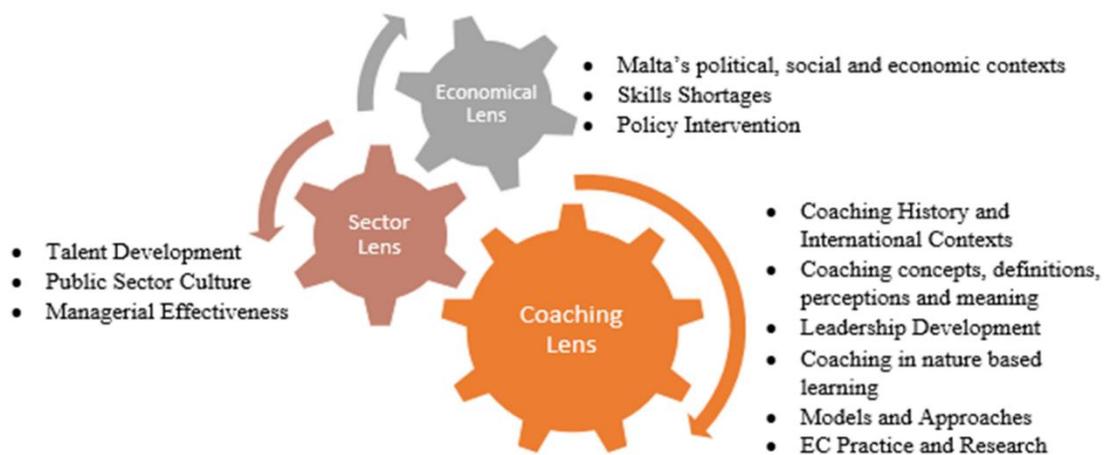


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework  
(Source: Own Elaboration)

In this study, the researcher examined these three gears to see how they could improve team performance, employee productivity and managerial effectiveness through training, coaching, or other professional development programmes within the MPS. The input drives the bigger gear, while the output drives the smaller gears, which move more rapidly than the bigger gear. When these are switched, a larger cog spins slower. Until recently, within the context of Malta, the smaller gears were the input, while the larger gears were the output. This proves that economic and sectoral objectives need to be on an equal footing for coaching to be given prominence.

An organisation that offers a conscious competency-based training programme will be more engaged, productive and successful. Training today is synonymous with on-the-job training, which is more insightful than traditional face-to-face training. Employee engagement, job satisfaction and knowledge retention have been shown to improve through continuous learning strategies in the workplace (Papanthymou & Darra, 2019). It is vital that job-related training is also included in the MPS's objectives.

The main challenge within the MPS is to improve the middle-management skills needed to prepare them for senior roles and to enforce policies that make them part of the organisation's work culture. This requires the ability to network effectively, be involved in public relations, have cross-cultural sensitivity, be emotionally intelligent, communicate effectively, mobilise HIPO talent, and motivate and use critical thinking

skills. One of the most important discussions in TD is political will and coaching (Kolditz, 2022). Even if the political will (and budget) exists within the MPS, no platform to date identifies HIPO talent. Strong management support might be required.

Experienced and qualified SPOs might have a level of knowledge about the world that allows them to use their analytical skills – induction, deduction, probability, etc. – to guide their behaviour in the workplace. However, there is a serious geographical skills mismatch (EC, 2017, 2018), an underlying discriminatory attitude (Cassar & Munro, 2018), and limited advancement opportunities within the MPS (Tabone & Spiteri Gingell, 2013; Vella Scicluna, 2015). The traditional OC of the MPS seems burdened by ‘outdated’ bureaucratic practices that do not contribute to learning and detract from excellent teaching and learning (Cauchi, 2012; Law & Aquilina, 2013).

Learning should become more accessible, and much more can take place outside the classroom. It is not about teaching the skills *per se*; it is about applying the aspects of learning to the work context. A systematic understanding of how coaching contributes to the leadership skills gap is still lacking, so this work poses an important question that needs to be answered: ‘Can coaching contribute to closing the management and leadership skills gap in the MPS?’

The theoretical concepts used in this study relate to the different coaching approaches, such as cognitive-behavioural (Minzlaff, 2019), person-centred (PC) (Garner et al., 2022), solution-focused (SF) (O’Connell & Palmer, 2018), and existential (Hanaway, 2021). Among existing models in the coaching literature, the study proposes the Oxford Brookes model, which has been developed and tested within several UK public bodies for accrediting internal and external coaches to assess coaching skills. Other theories used in the literature related to talent development (TD), adult learning and OC. In addition, as this study is based on a mixed-methods research design, the researcher sought works that explore a variety of methods, the nature of theory, or the relationship between theory and mixed-methods research, to improve understanding of this area.

The implications for applying these theories show that coaching within the MPS may be challenged with new perspectives, which require public officials to recognise and

appreciate ‘collaboration,’ ‘participation,’ ‘sense-making,’ and a reduced ‘distance’ between the different management tiers.

We now proceed to the next section, which introduces the reader to the history and context of coaching in the international arena. A picture of coaching’s history can help readers and scholars appreciate and understand its different foundations, established principles and philosophies.

## **2.3 COACHING HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS**

Historical context is an important aspect to consider when reading written work. It can change or strengthen the overall meaning of the topic and reveal information or perspectives otherwise missed. This section is divided into two parts. Subsection 2.3.1 will address aspects of past events, and 2.3.2 will discuss issues related to current scenarios.

### **2.3.1 Past Scenarios**

The last two decades have seen a growing trend towards using coaching in the international arena (Kechagias & Antoniou, 2019; Unger & Hopkins, 2018). Work by historians has shown that the approaches and schools of thought in coaching have emerged in the Western world. For example, in Greek mythology, we learn that Telemachus, son of Odysseus, was assisted by a wise and trustworthy old man known as the ‘mentor’ (Cassling et al., 2022). Even philosophers have included coaching in their teachings. For example, Socrates (427–347 BC) was one of the first recognised coaches to raise awareness through questioning and reflection (Kiss, 2019).

A helpful overview of earlier work is given by Gorby (1937), who published the first peer-reviewed article on coaching, showing how top management and senior executives were coached to increase profits and reduce waste as part of a profit-reducing sharing plan. Four decades later, a ‘coach’ was perceived as one who coaches athletes, manages teams and provides professional services to companies. Since then, coaching has been associated with the world of sports; in the 1990s, there were conflicting views as to whether coaching was a discipline in its own right (Duignan,

2015). This professional discipline has gained prominence recently as the coaching business has become more sophisticated due to uncertainties and the challenges governments face in attracting FinTech companies.

Further, a body of research has focused extensively on the classification approach, which provides a simplified timeline of coaching practice (Figure 3). Walker (2004) has shown how most models and approaches in empirical coaching studies are derived from a clinical perspective.

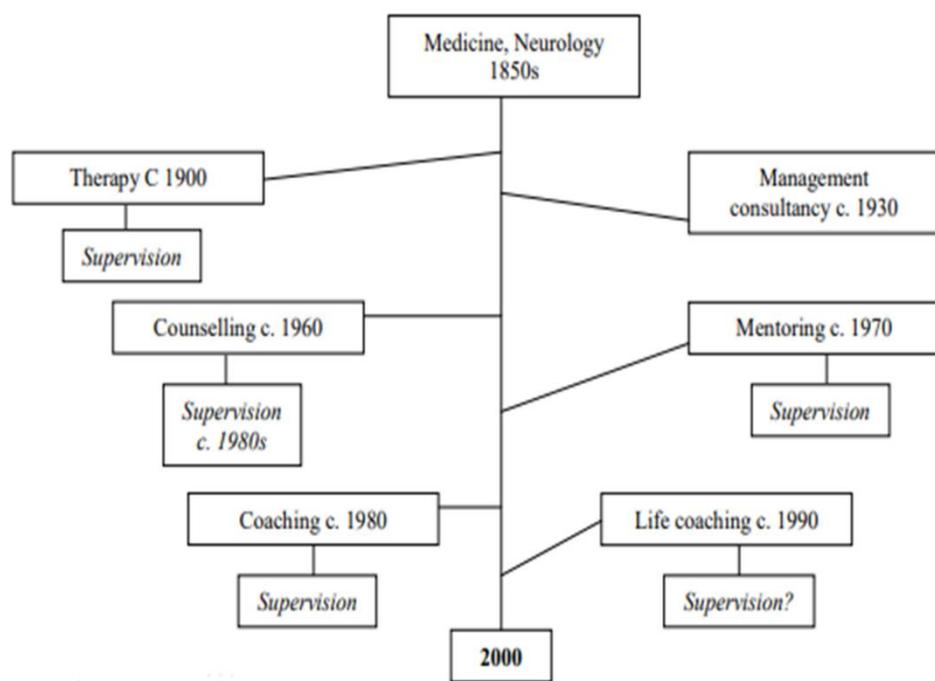


Figure 3: Historical classification of coaching  
(Source: Walker, 2004:19)

This is a helpful model for understanding the therapeutic focus of coaching; it sheds light on issues such as the need for supervision and accreditation, which were introduced in older professions such as psychotherapy and counselling psychology. According to several authors (Cooper & Law, 2018; Langs, 2019; Smith et al., 2022; Tudor et al., 2021), the therapeutic element plays a crucial role in obtaining successful client growth outcomes.

Internationally, coaching has attracted the attention of individuals and organisations from diverse backgrounds (Mofield & Phelps, 2021). Terms such as ‘paid friendship’, ‘the latest executive accessory’ and ‘pinstripe counselling’ have all been used to disparage coaching’s reputation (Theeboom, 2016). Over the years, coaching has been used to enhance organisational learning and now plays a significant role in TD, mentoring, international assignments, development programmes and succession planning (SP) (Ali et al., 2019). While some authors (Martino, 2019; Tsui et al., 2017) claim that coaching is one of the most effective approaches to professional development, other authors (Fusarelli et al., 2018; Kohestany & Yaghoubi, 2017) state that this professional discipline is quite expensive. In the UK, considerable interest in coaching emerged as organisations sought to coach their managers rather than adopting a ‘command-and-control’ leadership style (McCarthy & Milner, 2020).

In recent years, many countries such as France, Holland, Sweden, Italy, Spain, and Malta have advanced their humanistic and performance-based approach to performance coaching (PFC) (Paquette & Trudel, 2018). In Central South America, Latin America and Canada, there has been much support for the recognition of organisational development (OD) (Bushe & Nagaiishi, 2018) for all training programmes offered, including coaching. As companies went to great lengths to find the right talent for OD, coaches were brought in to help managers transform and redefine the way goals were set (Williams, 2019).

Dirani et al. (2020) define OD as all activities by managers, employees and helpers that aim to build and maintain the health of the organisation as a total system. Cunningham (2021) develops this by proposing that OD works on the interfaces to optimise the system. The difference between OD and management development is clear - one deals with how an organisation changes over time, while the other focuses on individuals. Organisations have sought ways to improve their operations in a world where business is increasingly complex by focusing on culture change and leadership development as key drivers in creating better work environments for employees while also improving company performance metrics such as customer satisfaction ratings or revenue growth rates (Al Sabbagh & Copeland 2019).

Further, Africa and Russia seemed reluctant and cautious in promoting the coaching business (Western & Garcia, 2018). Despite coaching traditions, the Chinese, on the other hand, chose a path of their own. They adopted Western management principles and ancient Eastern philosophies within the Chinese context (Fengjiang & Steinmüller, 2021). Unlike China, Japan and South Korea have a coaching heritage that dates to the North American tradition (Seok & Chung, 2022). The only country in the Middle East that offers coaching is the Dubai Emirates, where most coaches are British nationals who have completed coaching training in the United Kingdom (Belefkih et al., 2019).

Professionals of various levels and disciplines may now benefit from coaching. The rising popularity of coaching is due to recent increases in organisational transformation, such as mergers and acquisitions. The acceleration of business processes, diversity in the workplace, globalisation and cross-functional teams are forcing managers to acquire new skills that cannot be taught through traditional training alone. The new ‘playing field’ for coaches is to remain relevant and creative and build a robust infrastructure in the digital world. Indeed, there has been a great migration from traditional to digital coaching in recent years (Watts et al., 2021).

### **2.3.2 Current Scenarios**

Since the outbreak of the COVID epidemic, many practitioners have honed their skills by undergoing further training. There is compelling evidence to suggest that in the not-too-distant future, the number of coaches who have completed their training and earned their credentials will be predominant (Marano et al., 2021). The more qualified and trained coaches there are, the more accountability there will be in the coaching field. The threshold for coaching standards will be increased, and coaches will need to meet the new requirements (Wolff et al., 2020).

At present, the coaching industry is not regulated. This almost implies that anybody who desires to assist others with their knowledge and experience (or lack thereof) may call themselves a ‘coach’. This insufficient regulation and the subjective nature of coaching have prompted detractors to cast doubt on the coaching industry. It is relatively commonplace for businesses to hire only certified and competent coaches to coach their staff. They want to be confident that their chosen coach is appropriately

qualified and accredited (Schutte, 2019). Certifications from respected coaching institutes such as the AC, International Coach Federation (ICF) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), amongst others, are often sought by both prospective clients and coaches (Fontannaz, 2018; Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Indeed, these professional bodies have driven standardisation in the coaching industry (Carden et al., 2021; Grant, 2020); however, as already acknowledged in Chapter 1, subsection 1.4.2, some academics (Fontannaz, 2018; Lyle & Cushion, 2017) remain sceptical about the current coaching frameworks and qualification schemes.

We now turn to the coaching trends in 2022 and some clues as to why the coaching discipline will continue to evolve in the years to come.

The epidemic was a wake-up call for both workers and companies. The rigid ‘9 to 5, in the office’ schedule was abolished almost overnight, and now ‘remote working’ is the new buzzword. Employers and people who work in HR now have a new way of thinking and being. The notion that workers are ‘more productive’ at work has been proven wrong. People were working from home more because they wanted to show their employers they were not lounging in the luxuries of their homes (Walker & Baird, 2019).

The impact of COVID had an unprecedented impact on the global economy in 2020, causing millions of people to lose their jobs. The term ‘Great Resignation’ was coined (Panchal et al., 2020). With millions of people worldwide, terminations peaked in April 2021 and have remained unusually high over the past year. Some people left their employment to seek remote work to spend more time with their families, while others saw their worth after years of devoting their lives to an organisation that mistreated them (Rosen et al., 2022). The new norm provided an opportunity for everyone to do some soul-searching. People had lost their jobs, sought other jobs, or even started a new life. As more people work from home, the line between home and work has become less clear. The place we once considered a haven is now our workplace. Without vigilance, it is easy to lose track of time and become so engrossed in home-based work that we work through lunch, skip meals, and forget the importance of taking breaks. As a result, the concept of ‘holistic well-being’ has been given prominence in the business world in recent years. This new way forward for our society

focuses on more than just physicality, with components that include mental health and spiritual aspects (Grant & Atad, 2021).

The era of the Great Retirement gave companies, and even governments, the opportunity to hire new employees and nurture their workforces. They opened their doors to offer training and workshops, so current workers and job seekers could improve their skills for the next step in their careers (Lacerenza et al., 2017; Visser, 2021). Companies looking for talent, particularly in technology and e-commerce, benefited from the vast pool of skills available for employment. What does all this mean for coaches? Perhaps it offers opportunity.

The significant shift in life views and the recent dramatic life events provide enormous prospects for the coaching sector (Nyfoudi & Tasoulis, 2021). As individuals seek help in navigating personal issues or determining their next steps, the services of a life or career coach are likely to be in high demand (Taconis, 2018). The practice of coaching has experienced its own digital metamorphosis. Rapidly, online coaching through audio-visual methods has surpassed face-to-face coaching, with a significant increase in virtual coaching performed using platforms such as Zoom, Facetime, Teams, etc.

The growing usage of virtual coaching and technology has created even more choices for coaches to work with a more diverse range of customers than was previously possible. There has been a significant shift away from ‘conventional’ forms of coaching and towards digital forms of coaching in recent years (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Fortunately, most of a coach’s activities and processes may be automated to a large degree, utilising the appropriate technologies for managing organisational operations. Digital tools and coaching software enable it to perform essential business tasks such as signing contracts, sending forms and questionnaires, running courses, sharing files and documents, and giving virtual coaching sessions (Kanatouri, 2020).

A coach’s abilities and expertise remain critical to assist clients in meeting their goals. It will be more crucial in the digital sphere to give customers a smooth and professional end-to-end experience, from registration to fulfilment (Kanatouri, 2020). A few technological developments have also been made, including an increase in the application of mobile technology and artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning

(ML). Coaching is affected by these modern technologies and by others, such as chatbots (Chatterjee et al., 2021).

Organisations are increasingly focused on maintaining corporate culture, successful cooperation, collaboration, and employee engagement in the workplace (Al Sabbagh & Copeland, 2019). Face-to-face meetings, socialising with colleagues, and company-sponsored activities have decreased because of reduced face-to-face time. Employers will need to do whatever is necessary to hire and retain top performers, as job seekers now have access to many employment opportunities with more flexible working conditions. Their needs and expectations have increased, so employers may need to take more steps to exceed those needs and expectations (Kanatouri, 2020).

Employers recognise that each area must be developed to enable their employees to achieve their highest productivity, creativity and innovation levels. The coaching sector is well-positioned to benefit from these developments (Pennington et al., 2022). Coaches have also had to adapt to the new standard due to these significant market shifts and changed customer expectations. Thus, there is tremendous potential and market of individuals who will benefit from such coaching services, which we have seen particularly in times of significant upheaval and instability.

## **2.4 DIVERSITY IN COACHING AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE**

This section discusses the definitions, perceptions and meanings related to objectives 2 and 3 of this study. While conceptualising coaching as an evolved form of leadership, much of the discussion will acknowledge the distinctions between coaching and other active forms of professional development (i.e., mechanisms that can also help individuals overcome personal and professional challenges in a structured and supportive manner). The discussion will be extended by debating the essence of OC in a public sector context.

### **2.4.1 Definitions, Perceptions and Meaning**

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the mixing of roles that fall under the term ‘coaching’ has led to several misunderstandings in Maltese social and cultural contexts

(see Cauchi, 2012; Law & Aquilina, 2013; Vella Scicluna, 2015). Several divergent accounts of coaching definitions have been proposed, creating many controversies (e.g., Passmore & Lai, 2020), which make research findings less transferable and effective. Salem and Lakhali (2018) suggested that the need for standards and adherence to specific criteria are crucial for self-regulation in an unregulated industry. The self-identification of coaches is sometimes claimed to be empirically underdeveloped, making it challenging to evaluate coaching practices (Firmansyah & Hawadi, 2022). The literature on different forms of coaching is rich in examples that aim to convey an image of professionalism. Later in this project, comparisons between definitions will be made to assess whether coaching as a professional learning opportunity (among other active forms of PD) could help reduce the significant skills gap in the MPS.

Coaching has garnered much interest within the research community. Some claim that the term ‘coach’ is derived from the Old Northern French *coche*, the German *kutsche* and the Hungarian *kocsi* (from *kocs*, meaning ‘carriage’, which was more accurately translated as *kocsi szekér*) (Marcdante & Simpson, 2021). Recent scholars in the field consider coaching as a form of ‘developmental’ (Lopez, 2017; Nadeem & Garvey, 2020) or ‘cognitive-behavioural process’ (Minzlaff, 2019). In recent research, Ali et al. (2018) examined the critical aspects of coaching vs mentoring, while Kuna (2019), Hațegan (2020), Lee (2021) and Kroeze (2022) investigated the aspects of coaching vs process consultancy. A large body of published studies (e.g., Bachkirova & Baker, 2018; Graßmann et al., 2020; Keller, 2021) draw parallels between counselling and coaching and the common elements of collaborative discourse as part of the search for change and personal growth. Other researchers (Biech, 2022; Subotnik et al., 2021) have compared these practices with training or TD.

Cidral et al. (2021) describe coaching as a collaborative and egalitarian relationship between a coach and a client, both of whom agree to focus on achieving goals. Ibarra and Scoular (2019) believe that coaching unleashes people’s potential to maximise their performance; it is a short-term intervention to improve performance or build specific skills (Gascó-Hernández et al., 2018). Similarly, Shi and Witte (2018) argue that coaching is a Socratic-oriented, future-focused dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (coachee/client), in which the facilitator asks questions, and

the participant becomes self-aware and takes on responsibility. The coach thus acts as a facilitator, enabling the individual to effectively regulate and direct their interpersonal and intrapersonal resources to meet their defined goals. Based on these perceptions, coaching may be described as a collaborative relationship to set goals and improve individual and organisational performance. This emphasis on goals extends to standard process models and approaches to coaching (see subsection 2.4.4).

According to Witherspoon and White (1996), there are three critical coaching components: skills coaching (SC), performance coaching, and developmental coaching (DC). In this study, these critical components are examined and compared to the concepts of other authors. An attempt is made to integrate these components with the objectives set for this study.

*Skills coaching* (SC) refers to specific knowledge the coachee needs in the workplace. Competence, on the other hand, is gained through acquiring experience and knowledge. Pedersen et al. (2021) state that coaching programmes aim to improve specific skills such as negotiation and communication. For instance, in the public sector environment, SC programmes may need to analyse and respond to new emerging technologies such as blockchain (Deloitte Malta, 2019) and AI (Malta Independent, 2019) while equipping SPOs with specific skills to communicate practical mechanisms to citizens and stakeholders, in order to effect policy change (Law & Aquilina 2013; Vella Scicluna, 2015).

*Performance coaching* (PFC) involves raising the coachee's performance level in their role. Any competent leader with the knowledge and experience to coach others can offer PFC, whereby one person drives the development of another to achieve desired changes in the workplace or life in general (Tanskanen et al., 2019). For example, the Dutch use the Instituut Nederlandse Kwaliteit (INK) Management Model to identify areas in an organisation that would need improvement (Van Brouwer et al., 2019). Another system used in businesses, industries, governments and non-profit organisations worldwide is the Balanced Scorecard (Quezada et al., 2019). This tool aims to obtain a complete view of employee work performance. The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model identifies expected outcomes and relationships (Toma & Marinescu, 2018). Complementary to these

systems is the 360-degree approach, which incorporates employee surveys, departmental feedback, and sometimes public service users. The concept of 360-degree feedback is to solicit feedback from top management, peers and subordinates, to assess management effectiveness (Fleenor et al., 2020). In Apap's (2016) study on modernising the performance appraisal system in the public service/sector, half of the survey participants supported the notion of using instruments that include multiple assessors.

*Developmental coaching (DC)* shares some characteristics with mentoring; it requires a more holistic perspective and addresses personal and professional development (Bachkirova, 2022). It suggests 'therapy for people who do not need therapy' and often involves personal reflection and self-awareness, where coachees explore flaws and options and formulate action plans (Grant & Green, 2018). This coaching genre is related to leadership and executive coaching (Ellam-Dyson et al., 2018). Unlike the SF approach, DC does not involve conditioning. Although individuals can be encouraged to attach importance to their management and leadership style, development occurs when DC is motivated by attitudes rather than behaviour change (Le Comte & McClelland, 2017; Lee et al., 2019).

As coaching has grown in popularity, its characteristics and approaches merge with those of other professions (e.g., mentoring) within human resource development. Mentoring can support career development initiatives and help organisations communicate their values and behaviours (Goodman & Cohen, 2018; Martino, 2019). Peer-to-peer support is considered an essential component; this is best provided via mentorship (Griffiths et al., 2018) and the dissemination of sharing good practices (Kha-Moua & Paulus, 2021). According to Mullen and Klimaitis (2021), mentoring is like coaching, but it is a more education-related and learning approach that can be used on the job. Some well-known companies use internal mentoring programmes to develop HIPO employees (Nyfoudi & Tasoulis, 2021).

From the above discussion, there seem to be subtle similarities between coaching and mentoring. We learn that coaching is a short-term intervention to improve performance or develop a particular set of skills, but mentoring is viewed as an ongoing relationship

that can be further extended to encourage mentees to identify their skills and talents in the workplace.

Although there seems to be a recognition of similarities between mentoring (directive/instructive) and coaching (non-directive), existing accounts do not resolve the contradiction between the two disciplines (Hobson & van Nieuwerburgh, 2022). The difference between directive and non-directive coaching is that directive coaches presume the coachees need to learn skills and methods in a classroom environment. Knight and Paterson (2018) recommend a mix of directive and non-directive coaching. In emergencies, non-directional coaching outperforms directive coaching (Lee et al., 2019). [Table 1](#) below illustrates the differences between coaching and mentoring, as suggested by Fielden (2005).

Table 1: Differences between Coaching and Mentoring Relationships

<b>Coaching</b>	<b>Mentoring</b>
A relationship has a set duration.	An ongoing relationship that can last for a prolonged period.
More structured meetings are scheduled regularly.	It can be more informal; meetings can take place when the mentee needs some advice, guidance or support.
Short-term (sometimes time-bounded) and focused on specific development areas/issues.	More long-term and takes a broader view of the person.
Coaching is rarely performed because the coach needs to have direct experience of their client's formal occupational role unless the coaching is specific and skills focused.	Mentor, protégé or activist is usually more experienced and qualified than the mentee. Often a senior person in the organisation can pass on knowledge and experience and open doors to otherwise out-of-reach opportunities.
The focus is on development or issues at work.	The focus is on career and personal development.
The agenda is focused on achieving specific and immediate goals.	The mentee sets the agenda, with the mentors providing support and guidance to prepare them for future roles.
Coaching revolves more around specific development areas/issues.	Mentoring revolves more around developing the mentee professionally.

(Source: Fielden, 2005:5)

Similarities between coaching and mentoring have been well-documented in the literature. Both focus on professional skills and growth and discuss training and feedback (Farrell, 2019). Mentorship is seen as a one-way, hierarchical link between a more experienced or senior professional and a younger or less experienced person

(Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2021). However, mentoring opportunities lead to reciprocal relationships that provide both people with long-term support and feedback (Farrell, 2019). In a mentoring relationship, Reczek (2018:14) observes that ‘one person takes on the role of listening and delivering advice and assistance’ and provides ‘just-in-time advice’. As the mentoring relationship matures, the mentee can become more active in the process, acting as a listener and offering guidance and commentary to create opportunities for mutually beneficial learning. There are both formal and informal mentoring programmes; the former are usually for new employees or new members of a professional group (Gill et al., 2018), while informal mentorship often develops more naturally and is based on shared interests and encouragement (Reczek, 2018).

The hiring of coaches is also seen as a supervisory and management duty. This can contribute to some confusion between the roles of mentoring and coaching. For instance, mentors are not subject to the same level of accountability as supervisors (Del Campo, 2022). Although Farrell (2019) emphasises that supervisors can become mentors, they are accountable to the company and not to the mentee. In essence, this suggests that managers cannot act as mentors – even though, by definition, mentors are expected to have authority over the people they mentor. Both mentors and coaches criticise; however, a mentor may focus on contributions to one’s career or a specific problem, while a coach focuses on skills and performance (Reczek, 2018).

On the other hand, coaching is often more directly related to supervision and the organisation rather than the profession. It is characterised as a directed development process led by a coach (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2018), which is conducted by colleagues, superiors, or expert trainers over six to twelve months (Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2021). While the concept of collaboration can be conveyed, the connection is understood to be based on organisational hierarchy. Other definitions of coaching focus on the person. Grant (2022) considers the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural changes that go along with coaching, while Rounpel et al. (2019) focus on the process as a way of helping people reach their full potential.

In coaching literature, staff development is often treated realistically, emphasising skills and work performance (Reczek, 2018). Much of the coaching literature is

anecdotal and focuses primarily on employees, while some articles provide empirical data about coaching and its benefits. Although there is much discussion of mentoring in academia, there is no clear description of what mentoring entails. In contrast, coaching is geared more towards staff development and motivation and is not mentioned as often as mentoring. Most research on mentoring is found in peer-reviewed journals, while most articles and research on coaching are found in peer-reviewed magazines.

The grey areas between mentoring and coaching raise issues about how the two notions vary in a professional setting. Instead of mentoring, goals such as exposing a person to a new work culture or helping them develop a particular skill set are sometimes called coaching (Malling et al., 2020). Long-term objectives are typically developed as part of the mentoring process; these include career growth, starting with the job search and seeking promotions or tenure. On the other hand, coaching is regarded as having a fixed timeframe and being focused on a particular goal, problem, or work performance (Nguyen et al., 2019).

A dialogue between mentoring and coaching is based on the basic principles of learning; the methods, models and parties involved in the process (client, coach, or mentor); and the skills, attributes, ethical practice, general context, and influence of successful practices (Gavin, 2022). Authors such as Akhbari and Hadders-Algra (2020) and Bozer & Jones (2018) apply a professional perspective to related forms and interventions, substantiated by case studies, as a long-established method in coaching research. There is also growing support in the literature for the claim that the term ‘coach’ is sometimes perceived as ‘counsellor’ or ‘consultant’ in a broader context to create a clear distinction from other disciplines (Grant & Green, 2018). A counsellor working across multiple sectors (healthcare, education, the voluntary and community sector, or private practice) helps someone through a crisis and to come to terms with the past (Haşegan, 2020).

In the UK, the British Government restrict designations such as ‘counselling psychologist,’ ‘clinical psychologist,’ ‘industrial psychologist,’ and ‘occupational psychologist’ so that nobody can use these designations unless warranted or licensed

(Hills, 2016). The aim is to protect the public from risks and harm caused by unnecessary interventions.

A ‘consultant’ may act as a coach or mentor, but the main difference between these roles is that a consultant is often paid for a specific task (Grant & Green, 2018). The purpose is likely to be business-related: for example, to help improve a strategic business plan or to advise on job ownership (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2020; Fusarelli et al., 2018). The consultant usually focuses on a complete process or principle rather than a specific service or entity. They work on a specific agenda set by small, medium or large organisations (Van Genderen, 2014; Zeus et al., 2008). Some analysts (e.g., Homan Blanchard & Miller, 2010; Hermel-Stănescu & Svasta, 2014) have tried to draw subtle distinctions between coaching and consulting, as shown in Table 2. These collections of papers highlight the problems encountered; they categorise each discipline as a directive or non-directive approach and focus on specific provider capabilities, the process, and the duration of the intervention.

Table 2: Differences between Coaching and Consultancy

<b>Coaching</b>	<b>Consultancy</b>
The objective can include human change, behavioural modification, personality development, cognitive ability, self-directed learning, and growth through challenge.	The objective can cover a broad spectrum, e.g. executive support, image/brand creation / maintenance/modification, profitability, quality, product, service.
The client identifies the topic/problem.	The topic/problem is left to the consultant to distinguish.
The coach need not be an expert.	The consultant holds the expertise and can analyse, identify, recommend and implement the desired changes. S/he is the specialist within an area.
The coach has a non-directive approach.	The consultant exercises his/her content knowledge in a highly directive way, maintaining a professional relationship with the client, based on a problem-solving issue or dilemma.
Coaching skills: Ability to understand/employ the coaching process, the interaction between awareness/responsibility, deep listening, and effective questions. A coach must have the following personal skills: self-esteem, regard for others, self-awareness, awareness of others,	Consulting skills: To examine the organisation, understand the structure, assess the nature of power and politics, isolate the important factors, use related business practices, and have the creativity to suggest solutions.

emotional resilience, personal power, goal-directedness, flexibility, an invitation to trust, a balanced outlook, emotional expression and control, and conflict handling.	A consultant must have personal skills: self-confidence, courage, initiative, perseverance, ability to listen, ability in oral and written communication, ability to instruct people, ability to motivate and persuade, and emotional maturity. Technical skills include knowledge and experience in a technical subject.
A coach asks questions, is goal-oriented, and promotes discovery.	A consultant gives answers and solutions, is oriented towards solving.
The coaching process considers all aspects of the client's life.	Consultancy considers work-oriented aspects.
Focuses on 'you.'	Focuses on 'me.'
Promotes interdependence.	Promotes dependence.
Focuses attention on underlying motivation that drives people towards effective relationships through deep listening and acceptance of wholeness.	Contributes new knowledge and technical competence for creating organisational results.
Models and imparts unconditional curiosity that creates awareness, accesses hidden strengths, and generates clarity and alignment.	Provides objective research and analytical assessment, upon which to base relevant content recommendations for change.
Partners with leaders to co-create an environment for direct communication, powerful questions and teamwork as the source of improved performance.	Co-creates answers and action plans for individuals and teams to create and manage knowledge and implement change.

Sources: Van Genderen (2014); Zeus et al. (2008); Homan Blanchard & Miller (2010); Hermel-Stănescu & Svasta (2014)

As the preceding table indicates, coaching and consultancy require conventional competencies/skills: emotional intelligence, creative/critical thinking, and organisational and communication abilities (Hermel-Stănescu & Svasta, 2014; Homan Blanchard & Miller, 2010; Zeus et al., 2008). The relationship between the incumbent and the client would depend more on the parties involved and the preferred working style. Van Genderen (2014) claims that while coaching and consultancy are almost identical, they do not overlap. Both roles aim to enhance people's professional development.

As the world of work becomes more diverse, professional practitioners are required to address the leadership challenges in the workplace. Although leadership is accepted in the coaching literature (Wallace et al., 2021), coaching takes an active role in helping leaders to develop others; so do mentoring and consultancy. This supports the claim

that leadership can be one of the fundamental components of coaching. However, this aspect still confuses the research community; but is coaching an evolved form of leadership?

#### **2.4.2 Is Coaching an Evolved Form of Leadership?**

Leadership has long been a topic of great interest in various fields. It is a process of social influence that maximises the efforts of others to achieve individual and organisational goals (Tang, 2019). Compelling evidence suggests that leadership is the ability to bring about change and maximise team performance (Einzig, 2017; Hendrikz & Engelbrecht, 2019). It is clear from the available evidence in the literature that the role of the leader today is becoming complex as the dilemmas of public and private institutions and society are changing on many fronts (Rimita et al., 2020; Weinzierl, 2018). Adriasola and Lord (2021) claim that leadership involves many processes between leaders and their followers (individuals, dyads, groups, and collectives).

Some researchers (Baldwin & Farley, 2019; Davis & Rhodes, 2020) distinguish between public administration and business leadership. This distinction is attributed to various aspects. For example, these authors claim that goals and processes in public administration are more complex, ambiguous and bureaucratic than in business. A recent systematic review investigated an important research strand in the public leadership community (Christensen et al., 2020). According to the authors, public sector leadership has become less sensitive to environmental change and did not find that public sector leaders would benefit from a lifetime of service in the same role as many private sector leaders. The same authors point out that public sector leaders are expected to manage better the complexities of political change and growing environmental demands. While leadership in the private sector is based on entrepreneurship, the public sector aims for predictable outcomes in decision-making (Kuziemski & Misuraca, 2020; Martin, 2018).

Three other aspects are recognised in these sections: leadership theories, a review of leadership models, and the coaching aspect for managerial and leadership effectiveness.

## *Leadership Theories*

Leadership can be viewed as a sequence of structured interactions through which an individual enables and directs their followers' growth, development and performance (Sun & Shang, 2019). There are leadership theories that explain how and why certain people become leaders, and management/leadership coaching aligns with several leadership theories: 'leadership theory', 'great man theory', 'behavioural theory', 'group theory', 'trait theory', 'contingency theory' and 'situational theory'. Other leadership theories include 'charismatic', 'transactional', 'laissez-faire', 'transformative' and 'servant leadership' (Durmus et al., 2020; Seddon, 2019; Uslu, 2019). These theories define various traits and behaviours found in coaching (Appendix H) to enhance leadership skills and development.

In traditional leadership theory, subordinates or employees respond to their leader's discretionary influence and effectiveness (Andreoli et al., 2020). Although the relationship between leadership behaviours and effectiveness has been investigated, few academics have examined the variations between public and private sector personnel on job satisfaction and organisational commitment. According to Hooijberg and Choi (2001),

the relationship between leadership behaviour and effectiveness might be significantly different between these two sectors because of differences in their environments in terms of market forces and exposure to legislation, legislatures and public service rules. These different environments affect, we argue, the discretion afforded leaders in these sectors, which in turn affects how they lead. (p. 404)

Notable leadership theorists such as Van Oosten et al. (2019) have noted that coaches working in leadership, like the leaders they coach, need to develop resonance relationships with the people they lead. There are a few variations in how 'manager as coach' is practised. Primarily, this requires the ability of the leader and coach to cultivate the essential skills of compassion, mindfulness, and hope within themselves before trying to support the expansion and improvement efforts of others. If so, the conceptual and functional structures identified in good coaching relationships and effective leadership may be similar.

Coaching relationships have been conceptualised as distinct types of helping relationships that share many of the same structural and interpersonal characteristics as the related helping professions of psychotherapy and counselling (Challoner & Papayianni, 2018); this view continues to receive practice-based solid support (Hanley, 2021). Greenleaf was one of the first leadership theorists to claim that coaching relationships were essential to leadership effectiveness (Cooper, 2018; Pawar et al., 2020). However, it was not until recently, with the publication of Jaworski et al.'s (2020) paradigm-shifting work on synchronicity and the subsequent emergence of emotionally intelligent leadership, that introspection and self-management became central to the effectiveness of leadership. Leadership transitioned from 'new-age' and fringe well-being hype to self-evident truth. Around this time, early executive coaching writers, such as de Haan (2019), made the speculative suggestion that coaching itself might be viewed as a more advanced form of leadership.

### ***Review of Leadership Models***

Although both coaching and leadership are viewed as complex social processes, leadership models created for an organisational setting have significantly impacted the training and practice of organisational leadership in the real world (Churchill, 2022; Mollman & Candela, 2018; Tang, 2019). Coach leadership has been studied using coach relationship frameworks because both coaching and leadership are social processes that arise and are supported by interpersonal relationships. Models of coach leadership may not hold the same applied value to coaching practitioners, despite coach leadership and coaching effectiveness models being formulated and tested in the broader setting.

Using these frameworks, researchers have been able to delve deeper into the interpersonal processes and structures that underlie successful and fulfilling interpersonal interactions. The relationship between a coach and a leader has been conceptualised by Perera (2019) in terms of four interpersonal dimensions: proximity, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. In addition, Love (2020) integrated environmental, cognitive, and personal orientation features into a motivational model of the coach-athlete relationship. These traits influence coach behaviour, which

impacts perceptions of a leader's competence, autonomy, connectedness and intrinsic drive.

The work in this area is ongoing and varied. Adair (2006) emphasised that it is the leader's responsibility to ensure that the needs of the task, the individual and the group (Figure 4) are balanced and that effective leadership strategies are considered. Adair (2006) stated that leadership is always learnt 'on the job' and that coaches/mentors play a role in developing their leadership skills in this cycle. In his three-circle model, within the 'individual development' segment, Adair suggests that mentoring or coaching plays a role when suitable. This is not at odds with general claims about the effectiveness of individually led, experiential learning approaches. Given the pace and scale of today's workplace, leadership plays a significant role in cultivating change, empowering people, and fostering innovation and new abstractions.



Figure 4: Adair's Action-Centred Leadership Model  
(Source: Kaplan Financial Knowledge Bank, 2012)

The debate over Adair's three-circles model has regained prominence, with some authors (Ackah, 2019; Shafiu & Muslim, 2019) arguing that the model is overly authoritarian and rigid. For example, Ackah (2019) states that the model is not culture-dependent and is questionable for reasons of timeliness. The present author takes a middle-ground position, arguing that considering individual needs and keeping everyone happy can delay complex decisions. This is still a source of debate, and there might be other critics who either support or oppose this model. Even so, we learn from the literature that Adair's leadership theory can be taught and transferred to the coaching

context. The task needs a team because one person alone cannot accomplish wonders. If the team's needs are not met, the task will suffer, and individuals will not be satisfied.

According to the multi-dimensional leadership model (Arazmjoo & Rahmanseresht, 2019), there are three distinct stages of leadership behaviour: the required coach behaviour, the leader's chosen coach behaviour, and the actual coach behaviour. Each phase is influenced by the situation, the coach, and the leader. The basic idea of the model is that the congruence between the three phases correlates positively with the leader's performance and satisfaction. An alternative cognitive-mediative model of coach leadership is provided by Turnnidge and Côté (2018), based on the concept that cognitive processes and individual differences act as mediators between coach behaviour and leadership outcomes, in addition to the effects of situational factors.

New leadership methods have become increasingly popular among authors in recent years. For example, Beer and Irving (2021) studied the application of the transformational leadership paradigm to the sports coaching environment with encouraging results. Moreover, a new study by Eva et al. (2019) shows that 'servant leadership' might be a suitable paradigm based on basic principles of trust, humility, and service to others. This study provides insight into the behaviours of influential coach leaders; however, when this data is viewed collectively, the most acceptable leadership model for coaching research becomes unclear.

Organisational leadership models are highly influential and applicable, despite facing the same complex problems. These models have been used to inform organisation-wide leadership practices and education, ultimately leading to improved business effectiveness (Harris & Mayo, 2018). Researchers could effectively identify significant aspects affecting coach behaviour and assess the impact of coach behaviour on the leader's performance and development as a result of these methods; hence, they effectively served their intended goal. Even though these models accomplish their intended purpose, they are somewhat confusing for coaching practitioners and coach educators who try to base their actions and programmes on such models. A more practice-oriented model may be needed, as such a model would be more useful in real-world coaching. Some ideas for expanding the applicability of these models include

emphasising the mutual relationship between coach and leader and placing it in a specific coaching context (Blanton & Wasylyshyn, 2018; González-García et al., 2022).

### *Coaching for Managerial and Leadership Effectiveness*

Effective and influential leaders engage in a process that resembles that of their coaches, often in the context of leadership coaching. The early work on leadership coaching centred around the study by Hunt and Weintraub (2007), who regarded the leader as a coach. When these authors first coined the term ‘manager-coach,’ they were referring to business leaders and managers who use coaching to help their employees learn and improve and to create environments conducive to learning, development and adaptability. Two perspectives on power within an organisation seem to be important in this context: (a) the organisational hierarchy of leadership, responsibility and power; and (b) the sense of empowerment or exercise of power that arises when individuals within the organisation learn how to work together through coaching initiatives. Dwyer (2019) supports these views and broadens his perspective on leadership and management practice, emphasising that coaching has become one of the most significant advancements in leadership development.

Effective coaches use this insight to actively manage the positive and negative impact of these attributes on their clients’ development processes (Pandolfi, 2020). Sepahvand and Morovati (2020) have described traits that categorise influential leaders and labelled them ‘Level 5 leaders’. These give credit to others; they understand the team and their work, and when something goes wrong, they take the blame (Tytko et al., 2020). ‘Level 4 leaders’ commit to and pursue a solid, compelling vision that leads to higher performance. ‘Level 3 leaders’ are those who sort people and resources and pursue pre-determined goals. Sepahvand and Morovati (2020) found that ‘Level 2 leaders’ collaborate with team members to achieve group goals, while ‘Level 1 leaders’ contribute to coaching and TD.

Different coaching types have been identified, from external professional coaches to internal coaching used as a development tool. Internal coaching is used, for example, when managers adopt a coaching-based leadership style to promote employee growth

and team performance (Panait, 2017). According to some scholars, team performance traits are present in leadership and coaching disciplines (Einzig, 2017; Radović et al., 2020). Despite their initial enthusiasm, organisations invest considerable time, effort and money in developing the coaching skills of their leaders and managers, only to find that these individuals fail to apply the coaching skills they have learnt in the workplace and resort to old command-and-control behaviour patterns (Kim et al., 2020).

One of the most challenging aspects of working as a coach or a leader is dealing with the inherent subjectivity and bias that comes with the job (Ellis et al., 2019). A leader or coach's unique experiences and personality shape how they see their followers or clients. While it is crucial in this phase of self-exploration to bring these inner structures to the surface, the affirmation of one's self-concept lays the foundation for understanding its effect on others (Sun & Shang, 2019). Insights from the increased self-awareness of a coach or leader support deeper reflection and an ever-deepening self-image (Rucinski, 2020). Here, the leadership coach helps the leader make noteworthy progress in recognising and understanding their self-concept. This happens through the supervision process in the case of the coach. When a coach or leader is in this phase, they actively analyse their own biases, complexes and underlying schemas, which guide their current behavioural repertoire (Kim et al., 2020).

As the coach's or leader's perceptual filters and processing biases are more actively managed throughout the dialogue, a greater awareness of the richness of the client's or team member's experience with the coaching relationship can be tapped into. In other words, the coach or leader can communicate with the client or team member without minimising the subjective influences of their own life experiences, beliefs, opinions and judgements. This lets the coach gain a deeper understanding of their client or team member to achieve improved performance.

New performance levels become more likely and seem more attainable, which keeps the client or team member motivated to focus and work hard. Undertaking these different steps in the framework creates a link between coach and client, leader and team member based on a deep sense of shared meaning and a good understanding of the context. Once this is in place, it serves as a catalyst for the alliance to produce

transformative effects. The alliance promotes a strong sense of shared trust, commitment, and purpose by accepting and exemplifying the three compendiums of Carl Roger's PC therapy: empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard (Joseph, 2020). As a result of full, consistent, and persistent participation in these phases, the coach or leader can now facilitate client- or team-free conversations and deliver results in much less time (Terblanche & Heyns, 2020). These outcomes are also shared by the leader and the coach, who experience them simultaneously.

Coaching relationships become a source of motivation and energy for people who are positively affected by the outcomes in the broader customer relationship – or, in the case of the leader- the larger organisation's culture (Ellis et al., 2019). The possibilities of accelerated and transformative leadership and coaching results, as well as the chance of development and performance success, might be significantly increased through courageous and persistent commitment in the founding phases of the relationship formation process (Tudor et al., 2021). Hence, how can leaders and coaches be expected to lead and enable change and performance without being aware of themselves and their reactions to change?

Leadership requires indirect/direct learning and inquiry. This first introspection, disclosure and awareness phase lets the coach identify and build a deeper understanding and awareness of their specific strengths and weaknesses as a professional aid (Bertrand, 2019; Eurich, 2018; Fournier, 2020). The growing self-confidence of the coach or leader becomes the basis for continuous reflection and processing. Once the self-management plan is in place, the coach or leader may listen to the intent behind the client or team member's language and literal discourse to discover the core of what is being said. They can set the time, place, and intent to listen on a deeper level than is typical in casual conversation. If and when questions are asked, the coach or leader can create a conversational space within the alliance that allows the client's or team member's needs and reflections to be voiced, heard, and understood deeply. The coach or leader might pose increasingly nuanced and insight-revealing questions as the relationship strengthens. This method might be conceptualised as adopting the mindset of curious and intentional learners, supported by real attention, concern, and unconditional positive respect.

Mollman & Candela (2018) argue that intentional learners change their knowledge and behaviour as they acquire new skills. Smith-Merry (2020) claims that much learning takes place on the job, and for coaching to be effective, work knowledge and experience must be integrated. Similarly, Morris (2020) argues that learning takes place through experience (experiential learning) embedded in social interactions through cooperative and collaborative activities. Other researchers (Churchill, 2022; Tang, 2019) believe that managers who reflect on their own experiences help with forms of communication, become more involved with others, and can develop insight-surfacing questions. Insight-surfacing questions are those with a cumulative and generative impact on the person being asked and motivate them to think more deeply about themselves. These conceptual parallels provide an intriguing opportunity to examine how leadership competency can develop a deeper understanding of the coaching components (Cheesebrough et al., 2020; Sun & Shang, 2019).

Today's coaching components are shaped by a leadership mainstream that exerts an egalitarian influence on several organisations worldwide (Cregård & Corin, 2019). This influence allows coaches to address learning styles, outcomes and goals, feedback, linguistic assumptions, and conceptual hierarchies (e.g., learning styles by Mumford and Honey, multiple intelligences by Howard Gardner, etc.) The literature (Gardner, 2008; Joo, 2005) also refers to Milton and Meta's patterns (practical integration through observation and listening in three-way coaching conversations). This process of 'listening with the third ear' (Churchill, 2022) helps the coach or leader better understand the client's or team member's unique commitments and passions.

To sum up, this section aimed to examine whether coaching is an evolved form of leadership. As confirmed by several scholars, forms of coaching are implicated in theories about leadership. Various lines of evidence suggest that coaching is also becoming a learning culture that leaders at all levels seek to nurture. The reader is reminded that in this project, the term 'coach' does not refer to an 'expert' but a 'facilitator' of learning. Learning is an active process in which learners use their experiences to construct new learning. This researcher is interested in capturing information on developing an understanding (andragogy) (objectives 2 and 3) of the process, which can provide a frame of reference (objectives 1, 4 and 5) to reduce the impact of the skills gap in the MPS.

### 2.4.3 Coaching Pedagogy

This section aims to shape our pedagogical knowledge of the learning theories that can be applied to the coaching practice.

Coaching pedagogy has developed into a powerful platform in coaching. ‘Pedagogy’ is defined as ‘any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another’ (Watkins & Mortimer, 1999:3, cited in Brandwagt & Lynam, 2021). Coaching encompasses learning theories such as executive coaching, adult transformative learning, emotional intelligence, cognitive-behavioural theory, and positive psychology. As a short-term intervention, some organisations offer their employees the opportunity to develop themselves through coaching, training, or other learning activities, either in-house or through universities, colleges or institutions that offer coaching training programmes. In the case of Malta, public employees either be self-taught or look elsewhere for training programmes, mainly when they cannot find supportive leaders to push them up the career ladder (Cauchi, 2012; Tabone & Spiteri Gingell, 2013).

Both training and coaching approaches appear in the learning arena. The trainers determine the topic to be trained on, or at least write the material, based on a headline brief from the client. The coachee always chooses the coaching topic (Froehlich et al., 2017; Yenziaras et al., 2020). True coaching occurs when there is no obvious or single answer to the coachee’s problem. Coaches do not provide information, resources, or insights, as it is not the coach’s job to teach the coachee; their role is to give the coachee time and space to learn what they need. However, some training skills can be used in the coaching setting, such as questioning, listening, and providing feedback; thus, one-track solutions are not offered to the trainee (Froehlich et al., 2017; Yenziaras et al., 2020).

A skilled coach drives and harnesses the TD by ensuring everyone can contribute their best to the organisation’s growth through coach training. The approach of coach training is based on adult-learning theory (Stodter & Cushion, 2019), which is experiential and practical; hence, individuals who go to the training move forward with the confidence to coach in the right direction. A body of research has focused extensively on adult learning, as we shall see throughout this section. Adult learning

is associated with developing personal skills and the mechanisms by which individuals' skills are enhanced through lifelong learning activities (DiGirolamo, 2017). Coaching has the adaptability to support different learning styles. Two crucial phases of adult learning have been suggested in the literature (Gwyn & Cavanagh, 2021; Rothwell, 2020): improving skills and competencies that impact personal and social outcomes and improving organisational performance. Both phases are linked to objectives 1 and 4 (summarising the skills gap and identifying competencies) and objective 5 (improving management and leadership effectiveness).

As a counterargument, there may be unique methods used in adult learning, and the literature does not highlight one particularly workable method. According to some scholars (Bozkurt, 2019; Merriam, 2018), three dominant theories of adult learning support coaching development:

- Andragogy - the theory of adult learning developed by Malcolm Knowles (1970s).
- Experiential learning, as proposed by David Kolb (1984).
- Transformative learning theory, developed by Jack Mezirow (2003).

*Andragogy*: The term derives from the Greek ἀνδρ- (and-), meaning 'man', and ἄγωγός (agogos), meaning 'leader of' (Latchem, 2019). The German educator Alexander Kapp took up the concept in 1833, and it was further explored by Malcolm Knowles in the 1970s (Farooque, 2020). Andragogy, according to Knowles, is the art and science of self-direction. Andragogy theory posits that adult learning is self-directed and that adults need to know what they are learning and experiencing (Rick & Phlypo, 2019). [Table 3](#) below shows the six principles of andragogy established by Knowles, which illustrates a critical reflection on coaching to make the connection explicit.

Table 3: Coaching: Andragogy's True Heir

<b>Andragogy:</b> Six assumptions about adult learners: Knowles et al. (1998)	<b>Some Corresponding Principles of Coaching</b>
Adults are self-directed in their learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agenda comes from the client.</li> <li>• The relationship is a designed alliance (Whitworth et al., 1998:3).</li> <li>• The client sets the agenda (Rogers, 2004:8).</li> </ul>
Adults are goal-oriented: they need to know why they are learning something before they learn it, i.e., learning needs to be relevant.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching links inner purpose to outer work (Hudson, 1999:15).</li> <li>• Each client has their own commitments and immediate concerns (Flaherty, 2006:11).</li> </ul>
Adults have a vast wealth of life experiences to bring to their learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The client is resourceful, and the coach's role is to bring out the client's resourcefulness (Rogers 2004:7).</li> <li>• The client is naturally creative, resourceful and whole (Whitworth et al., 1998:3).</li> <li>• Clients are not empty vessels (Flaherty, 2006:11).</li> </ul>
Adults are interested in learning to solve real-life dilemmas. Learning needs to be relevant.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching means action and learning (Whitworth et al., 1998:5).</li> <li>• Coaching is a collaborative, solution-focused, result-oriented, and systematic process (Grant, 2005).</li> </ul>
Adults have a practical orientation. Their learning needs to have application in their personal and professional lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching addresses the whole person: past, present, and future (Rogers, 2004:8).</li> <li>• People will seek to engage in those activities that help them to meet their needs (Whitmore, 2002).</li> </ul>
Adults respond more to intrinsic motivators (increased self-esteem and quality of life) than to extrinsic motivators such as qualifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The focus is on connecting a sense of purpose with a vision of a coaching 'result' (Hudson, 1999:30).</li> <li>• Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance (Whitmore, 2002).</li> </ul>

*Experiential Learning:* One of the most influential accounts of experiential learning comes from Kolb (1984), who believes that learning takes place in the interplay between expectation and experience. He defines this learning as a '... process in which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (p.38); thus, in his view, the learner would plan based on what they have learnt. This process is known as

experiential learning. Success is then determined using task-specific criteria that help learners to methodically expand their knowledge (DeCapua et al., 2018; Nowiński & Haddoud, 2019) and reflect on their own experiences. As with coaching, learners' characteristics and attributes determine their goals, motivation, and engagement by taking action (Bakker & Leiter, 2017). Coaching and learning are collaborative processes where dialogue stimulates thinking, reflection and change. The principles of experiential learning can be applied to the client's actions and reflective learning from their own perspective and aspects of coach-client dynamics and social and collaborative learning (Bakker & Leiter, 2017).

Both problem-based and action-based learning involves examining various aspects of the problem at hand, defining desired outcomes, identifying resources and obstacles, formulating and evaluating measures, and starting selected alternatives. Viewing actions as an experiment would allow the coach and the client to examine and evaluate the outcomes as valuable insights and make changes or modify them as needed (Bakker & Leiter, 2017).

*Transformative Learning:* Transformative learning theory has evolved into an educational approach concerned with understanding and helping with profound change at the individual and societal levels (Mezirow, 2018). Through deep reflection, individuals change their assumptions and see the world through different lenses (Koulaouzides & Koutroukis, 2020). The coach's non-judgemental approach or exposure to judgement is critical in this process. One of the key assumptions related to transformative learning is that it is rooted in how people communicate. For change to occur, the coachee must first be clear about why s/he is doing something, and emotions are then perceived as a pathway to the awareness that precedes change. Thus, emotions go along with the transition from assumptions that lead to behaviour changes (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018; Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2019).

The methods described above are based on scientific data supporting the central notion that situatedness triggers learning to change behaviour (Lindeman, 1926; Pavlov, 1927; Piaget, 1929; Watson, 1930). The concept of 'situatedness' was introduced by Vygotsky (1962) and concerns transferring the meaning of life activities into the teaching and learning environment. In the public leadership context, this can be interpreted

as a process through which individuals learn how to take responsibility in agile and performance-oriented leadership structures (Cauchi, 2012). The adult-learning experience provides great insight into the strategies and processes that coaches can employ (objectives 2 and 3) to help their coachees make a significant impact (Rothwell, 2020).

The importance of this subject has also been emphasised in the Maltese literature. It is believed that Malta still has a long way to go to meet the new targets of the future. A closer look at Eurostat data for 2013 reveals that 7% of the Maltese population aged 25–64 was enrolled in adult education and training. The EU-27 average for 2012 was 9%, compared to the EU 2020 target of 15% (Eurostat, 2013). Assuming an 8% increase in an adult-learning, the available longitudinal statistical data on adult-learning participation in Malta seems unreliable. This is because adult learning is unlikely to reflect the actual Maltese participation rate in ‘adult education’ programmes (Eurostat, 2017). For instance, there is growing concern that some public leaders are disadvantaged because they are not offered fair opportunities for their career development (Cauchi, 2012; Vella Scicluna, 2015).

This section has attempted to outline a specific coaching approach based on adult-learning theories at the core of coaching development. According to Eurostat, Malta still needs to make significant efforts to strengthen adult education and training. Regarding career development, it has been reported that Maltese public managers should be offered fair opportunities to increase their knowledge and experience. The following section will compare the theoretical predictions to show how intentional learners can change their knowledge and behaviour by following specific models and approaches to develop coaching practices.

#### **2.4.4 Models and Approaches to Coaching**

This section of the literature review discusses the models and approaches to coaching concerning objectives 1, 2 and 4 of the study.

Many coaching models and approaches have been explored over the past two decades in business and financial coaching, management and life coaching, sports coaching, and other areas which are still emerging. The emphasis on coaching models and

techniques provides a framework for researchers and reflective practitioners to make sure future studies refer to previous work that recognises people’s desire to learn (Mollman & Candela, 2018; Smith-Merry, 2020).

### ***Models to Coaching***

Coaching models are both systemic and endogenous. The term ‘systemic’ describes diverse coaching approaches without explaining how the actual term is used, the philosophical basis of that meaning, or the context in which others are using the term (Von Bertalanffy et al., 2015). ‘Endogenous’ refers to how coaching leaders use their skills and talents to build models (Kunos, 2017). Baker et al. (2022) refer to coaching models and approaches as ‘roadmaps’ that focus on behaviour-change. The following [Table 4](#) is extracted from the work of Cox et al. (2014) to acknowledge the range of approaches that can be adopted.

Table 4: Coaching Models

<b>Coaching Models</b>	<b>Sources</b>
ABCD TRUST	Chung, J. (2011)
ACHIEVE	Buckler (1996); Dembkowski & Eldridge (2003); Palmer, (2007)
APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY	Cooperrider & Srivastva (2013)
CIGAR	Grant (2005)
COACH	Fleming & Taylor (2003)
CLARITY	Palmer & Szymanska (2007); Williams et al. (2010)
CLEAR	Grant (2011)
CLUES	Thier (2003)
GROW	Alexander (2006); Clutterbuck & David (2013); Whitmore (2002)
HERON’S INTERVENTION	Heron (1997); Sloan & Watson (2001)
INTENTIONAL CHANGE	Boyatzis et al. (2004)
LASER	Lee & Newby (2004)
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	Smerek et al. (2009)
OSKAR	Eisen et al. (2014); Gilbert & Whittleworth (2009)
POSITIVE	Ives (2008)
PRACTICE	Palmer & Szymanska (2007)
RAM	Sloan & Slutsky (2008); Sparrow (2009)
SCORE	DeLozier (1995)
SEVEN-EYED	Moyes (2009); Jackson (2011)
SPACE	Edgerton & Palmer, (2005); Greenberger & Padesky (1995); Lazarus (1989)
STAR	Stern & Brackett (2012)
STEER	Deans et al. (2006)
STEPPA	Critchley (2010)
STRIDE	Allison & Harbour (2009)
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING	Tobin (1996)

Numerous coaching models offer leader support. A detailed discussion of each model used in coaching is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it was worth listing some of these to provoke interest. The long-established classical models have many applications, approaches, perspectives and contexts that differentiate them from others. These models range from facilitative coaching (coach builds upon protégé's level of competence) to consultative coaching (coach consults an expert perspective), instructional coaching (coach draws on experience and shares resources), transformative coaching (coach exceeds improvement to move towards innovative thinking and acting), and collaborative coaching (coach works with protégé to develop skills and knowledge), and provides coaching that is consistent with leadership theory (Andriani et al., 2018; Jowett & Arthur, 2019; Knowles, 2021).

These models are customised, candidate-centric, goal-oriented, driven by the coach and candidate/protégé, and incorporate coaching–feedback cycles (Gray, 2018). These models combine behaviours, styles and situational and moderating factors into a single theoretical model that reflects management and leadership performance (Hickman & Akdere, 2018); this may help public leaders be more effective, but it may not be enough to teach public leaders how to coach and which models to use. Whichever technique is used, the fundamental philosophical framework of coaching can be interpreted as self-directed learning based on Wilson's (2012) eight core principles: Accountability, Confidence, Blamelessness, Solution Orientation, Challenge, Action, Awareness, and Trust.

When searching for the most relevant models used in coaching, the literature (Bachkirova & Smith, 2015) strongly suggests the Oxford Brookes model, developed in 2015 (Figure 5). This model was purposely developed and assessed for the accreditation of internal and external coaches in various UK public sector organisations to assess coaches' skills. Although this model inevitably has limitations and cannot resolve all the issues, it proposes to resolve some acknowledged concerns, as follows:

- I. Quality of skills and responsiveness – reflects the skills and behaviours required.

Some parts of the skills assessment will be necessary for evaluating coaches. All professional organisations use different frameworks, and the academic literature highlights several key parts that lead to effective practice (e.g., Bates & Morgan). On the other hand, this framework emphasises the coach’s responsiveness and the adaptation of those skills and components of excellent practice in response to the changing environment encountered during a coaching session. Rather than relying on individual testimonies or personal statements, it might be necessary to base this assessment on observed practice in that area.

- II. Quality of awareness and flexibility – the knowledge to apply psychological thinking skills.

Viewing coaching engagement as a complex adaptive system makes it clear that the quality of the interaction and relationship between coach and client significantly impacts the likely outcome. The relevant literature and research-based studies strongly support this position (e.g., DiGirolamo & Tkach, 2019; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2021). Mental flexibility and the ability to ‘tune in’ are expected in this area to develop a successful client relationship. The coach can comprehend the psychological intricacies of the coaching relationship and critically review his/her actions and decisions in response to various coaching practice challenges that serve as an indicator of self-awareness and reflexivity.

- III. Quality of professional commitment – the motivation to develop coaching skills.

Professional practitioners engage in learning or training as part of what is now known as continuous professional development (CPD) (Remegio et al., 2021). This includes both technical competence and, more important for this role, personal and interpersonal growth (Boehnke & Hanke, 2022). One of the most critical aspects in this area is the ability to create a meaningful development plan based on a good understanding of oneself and the context of one’s practice. Utilising supervision effectively is also a

crucial component. Here, we define supervision as interactive participation in a meaningful reflection on practice and an opportunity to investigate oneself as a professional rather than simply as a source of pertinent information, comments or advice or as a support system.

IV. Quality of conceptual thinking – the presence of knowledge and understanding of coaching.

Coaching draws from an interdisciplinary body of knowledge, and the diversity of access points enriches the information gained by coaches via their diverse experiences. However, professional knowledge alone is insufficient if the coaching process is viewed as a complicated adaptive system (Heinrich et al., 2021). The coach’s ability to create a coherent model of their practice will likely come from integrating pertinent knowledge and skills relevant to the profession they are working within and aligning those components with the persons undergoing assessments. Such a model makes it possible to explain ‘why they do what they do’ with enough depth and conceptual thinking flexibility.



Figure 5: Oxford Brookes Model (Source: Bachkirova & Smith, 2015)

Bachkirova and Smith (2015) and Narasimhan and Ramanarayanan (2014) suggest that the above model provides a comprehensive coaching approach. It includes two assessment dimensions: (i) preparation and the manifestation of practice and (ii) the

systemic internal/external coaching dimension. The first dimension shows that while certain attitudes and coaching awareness are necessary, external systemic elements stand for good practice. The second dimension indicates how the work should be done and what the coach does.

When critically evaluating the model, we can argue that it differs sufficiently from certification schemes in some areas. From a postmodern viewpoint, it is believed that this model makes it possible to evaluate and allow intersubjectivity to be carried out in the interaction process. The model is adaptable enough to allow institutions to set their own benchmarks under the different coaches to be evaluated. It allows for systemic changes based on the environment in which coaches work, eschewing a checklist approach in favour of the primary areas of investigation (Narasimhan & Ramanarayanan, 2014).

Coaching researchers have been seeking and proposing models of the coaching process for many years; some are idealistic representations of the coaching process, and others are empirically grounded in research. Also included in this category are models that are prescriptive in nature. Models help coaching researchers and educators understand how and why contextually pertinent decisions arise in the real world (Bachkirova & Smith, 2015). The coaching process lacks a solid conceptual foundation and crucial principles despite numerous and varied theoretical perspectives. The models developed are simplified and do not accurately reflect coaching practice. Due to the underestimation of the complexity of the coaching process, coaches have difficulties implementing these frameworks (Van Diggelen et al., 2021).

Scholars have progressed significantly in building models, strategies, programmes, and methods related to leadership coaching, and the next wave of research will yield new and fascinating insights into leadership in general. As researchers, we might continue to study this phenomenon with vigour, concentration and rigour, given the apparent importance of leadership and coaching relationships in generating effective client and organisational performance outcomes.

## *Approaches to Coaching*

While coaching encompasses various models that have enriched the coaching landscape (Dyess et al., 2017), some approaches add value to coaching, such as cognitive-behavioural coaching, the psychodynamic approach, the PC approach, and the positive approach psychology, and SF, along with other humanistic approaches. These approaches are discussed in these paragraphs.

*Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC):* This approach refers to coaches' methods to help their clients overcome fears, phobias, addictions, and obsessive behaviours so that the client can become their own self-coach (Hicks, 2018; Palmer & Szymanska, 2018). To enhance self-awareness of underlying cognitive and emotional limitations, the CBC coach invites the coaching client to review the evidence (or lack thereof) supporting their current views of the circumstances and consider alternative viewpoints. The coach encourages and pushes the client to develop increased awareness, self-esteem, self-acceptance and action mobility through Socratic questioning, active participation and conversation. PC approaches usually rely on the client to challenge themselves at some point, but this can take time and may not happen unassisted (Neenan, 2018).

Combining exposure or behavioural experiments with cognitive therapy is another feature of CBC that distinguishes it from other approaches, such as psychodynamic and PC approaches. CBC can help individuals master their own actions, thoughts and emotions. In this way, it helps the client stop blaming other people or situations instead of taking responsibility for their bad habits that hurt them and keep them from reaching their full potential (Neenan, 2018). Cognitive-behavioural coaching, like all coaching models and practices, can be used when the coach has received CBC training, is under supervision, the coaching contract has been correctly concluded, and the coaching client has expressed an interest in continuing the session. CBT is most likely to fail when the client has a clinical condition or refuses to accept either the emotional responsibility for the issues they bring to counselling or the coaching duty to carry out the agreed-upon remedies (Szymanska, 2022).

*Psychodynamic Approach:* The word 'psychodynamics' refers to a broad set of models that focus on the importance of unconscious processes in human behaviour and, in

particular, the dynamic interplay of different areas of the mind. It is important to emphasise that in practice, coaching is often used in an integrative way when the psychodynamic approach is contrasted with other theoretical traditions (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020). The psychodynamic approach deals with human functions and unconscious human behavioural processes. Due to the comprehensive nature of the method, DC is likely to draw from a variety of theoretical traditions, including the psychodynamic perspective.

One of the main goals of developmental and psychodynamic coaching approaches is raising awareness. This is because personal awareness and awareness of others are seen as the basis for making decisions that align with the coachee's purpose, values, goals and strengths (Roberts & Jarrett, 2018). Although DC, like psychodynamic coaching, is more concerned with raising awareness than achieving specific behavioural changes, raising awareness changes how a coachee thinks and feels. These more profound challenges are often the key elements that support permanent behaviour change. The psychodynamic coaching approach enables leaders to analyse the related assumptions implicit in their leadership approaches (Fulmer, 2018).

The psychodynamic approach provides an unrivalled resource for examining and understanding unconscious processes and their role in shaping and often limiting goal attainment, whether in the hidden agendas of an organisation's sponsor, a coachee's defences, or a team's distractions (Çitak et al., 2021). While coaching is inherently more flexible than counselling or psychotherapy in terms of session frequency and location, the psychodynamic approach encourages us to recognise that containment through fixed start and end times, a consistent physical environment, and explicit confidentiality all contribute to an experience of holding and enabling deeper exploration of the coachee's ways of making meaning (Dowson, 2022). Informed by the psychodynamic practice, the coach will also understand the importance of restraint and stillness in one-on-one training. The psychodynamic approach, however, also challenges coaches to develop their own ability to make sense of things and working one-on-one with a psychodynamic practitioner can be one of the best ways to do this (Chater, 2020).

The psychodynamic approach could focus too much on a coachee's problems and forego the benefits of focusing on that person's strengths. Still, the psychodynamic approach adds considerable depth and insight to coaching practice. It is best suited to situations where coachees are interested in studying the basics of their meaning-making patterns or where they feel stuck and are ready to do anything necessary to make a permanent transformation. The areas that lend themselves well to the psychodynamic method are leadership, development, team, and coaching supervision (Passmore et al., 2019).

*Person-Centred Approach (PC):* Carl Rogers was the first to develop the PC approach, starting in the 1940s and 1950s (Katz & Keyes, 2020). 'Person-centred' refers to the philosophical position that individuals are their own greatest authorities. This approach was seen as an alternative to the behaviourist and psychoanalytical models, which were then prevalent in American psychology; thus, it became a part of the third force in psychology: 'humanistic psychology' (Josep & Bryant-Jefferies, 2018). The term 'person-centred approach' is used intentionally to show that it is not a set of techniques but an approach. Carl Rogers coined the term 'counselling' for individual practice, but he might as well have used the term 'coaching.' In PC practice, these terms are interchangeable. In PC terminology, self-actualisation describes the process of becoming, which, depending on the social environment, can move forward in a positive, socially constructive direction or in a negative, socially destructive direction (Katz & Keyes, 2020).

A PC approach emphasises the good and bad aspects of human functioning. This approach does not discriminate between individuals based on their mental capacity, as relieving stress and dysfunction is the same as that promoting well-being and ideal performance (Katz & Keyes, 2020). From a PC perspective, there is no distinction between coaching and counselling. Hence, PC coaching is the same as PC counselling because it requires the same theoretical background, skills, and personal growth. From a PC perspective, there is no meaningful theoretical distinction between coaching and counselling. Perhaps the most apparent application of PC coaching is life coaching (Josep & Bryant-Jefferies, 2018). Many people who describe themselves as adopters of the PC approach, especially those who combine it with other approaches, probably do so in a watered-down way, emphasising the importance of the coach-client

relationship but failing to appreciate the depth of the approach's philosophical foundations (Rosengren et al., 2021).

*Positive Psychology:* This type of coaching approach is a science-based method that helps clients to enhance their well-being, maximise and use their strengths, increase their performance, and meet their desired goals. People can benefit from positive psychology by being enabled to think about what is most important in their life and what factors contribute to optimistic life scenarios (Green & Palmer, 2018). Positive psychology has provided the theoretical and scientific basis for PC and an arsenal of models and treatments essential to coaching practice. Although some psychologists studied well-being before positive psychology was founded in 1998, there was little early study, but now over 2,000 articles, chapters and books on positive psychology are published annually (Van Zyl et al., 2020). Perhaps these benefits will lead to a generally observed positive upward spiral.

As clients experience more positive emotions, their thought-action repertoire grows and becomes more diverse. In addition to promoting positive feelings, one of the most important goals of PC is to bring about the desired changes (Passmore & Oades, 2022). There are several goals of PC, some of which involve positive psychological interventions to promote well-being, to help clients gain the practical benefits of well-being, and help with lasting change. Several psychological paradigms have significantly impacted PC, but other paradigms have not been incorporated into the positive psychology movement. This may reflect the academic origins of positive psychology and the recent transition in science from psychoanalysis to cognitive-behavioural techniques. One of the recent developments in positive psychology is the study of organisational processes that lead to extraordinary outcomes. Proponents of this theory believe that good emotions, which are contagious and expand our repertoire of thoughts and behaviours, play a key role in this process (Van Zyl et al., 2020).

*Solution-Focused (SF):* Like any field of research, coaching relies on access to knowledge and underlying theories based on the SF approach (also known as the 'theory-free approach'). Compared to other forms of coaching – such as holistic coaching, which aims to develop spiritual solutions (Whitley et al., 2018), or autocratic approaches (Knights, 2021) – the SF approach offers insights into how the coachee

and the coach evaluate contingencies that seem problematic in an organisational environment. Holistic coaching differs from the SF and autocratic approaches because it focuses on a broader perspective representing more than one aspect of life. Coaches who pursue this type of coaching trust that all other issues influence people’s self-development (Whitley et al., 2018). The literature (Ab Razak, 2020; Hadley & Thomas, 2018) also refers to reality therapy and humanistic theories, both of which are SF. In this process, the coach intervenes in the behaviour of the individual to build stronger relationships and identify what changes are needed to maximise their life expectancy.

SF coaching equips people with the skills and knowledge to manage interpersonal relationships and become more engaged at work (Lucas & Larcombe, 2016). While SF approaches acknowledge the coach’s expertise to suggest solutions, these approaches seem overly simplistic for most issues addressed. The coachee often turns to the coach to solve organisational problems. As the literature (Lucas & Larcombe, 2016) informs, the coach participates in a process without controlling the outcomes or intervening. With enough affirmation, the coachee will overcome difficulties and deal with the situation that once seemed problematic (Ab Razak, 2020). Visser (2012) examined three critical underlying assumptions of SF approaches people, change and support (Table 5).

Table 5: Assumptions Made by SF Practitioners

Assumption	Description
About people	<p>People prefer to choose for themselves what they initiate, and they want to control much of what they need to do (need for autonomy).</p> <p>People prefer to be competent, view themselves as competent, and are already competent to some extent (need for competence).</p> <p>People want to have and build meaningful and caring relationships with other people and want to do things and make a positive difference to others (need for relatedness).</p> <p>There is always already a beginning of the desired situation on which further progress can be built (existence of past success).</p>
About change	<p>People change best by taking actions one step at a time and reflecting on and responding to the consequences of those actions, so an intelligible pattern eventually forms (stepwise change)</p> <p>Positive behaviour descriptions, both in the future and in the past, irresistibly trigger positive behaviours (positive behaviour descriptions).</p>
About helping	<p>Treating clients as cooperative, no matter how resistant they may appear, is the quickest and most promising way to encourage further cooperation (cooperatively).</p> <p>Working with the client’s frame of reference, without confrontation or blame, and</p>

without imposing an expert view on the client, is the quickest and most promising approach to help them develop an ever more constructive, realistic and useful perspective (client perspective).  
Focusing on identifying and amplifying what works, rather than on explanation in terms of personal characteristics and a problem's cause, is the quickest and most promising way to help clients make progress (focus on what works).

(Source: Visser, 2012)

The descriptions in the table above show how Visser's assumptions can be evaluated from the SF perspective. Visser (2012) suggested that one must be physically present to observe what is happening during coaching sessions, but other scholars (Smirnova & Silinevica, 2018) claim that what is happening in coaching remains mysterious. Visser's theories seem to follow other forms of non-analytic theories that share a common perspective, although they use the client–counsellor relationship and other processes to facilitate change (Clegg, 2018; Minzlaff, 2019).

This section has explored different coaching models and approaches that provide a frame of reference for future studies. Despite the different models and approaches mentioned in the literature, the underlying philosophical concept of coaching is self-directed learning. When searching for the most relevant models used in the coaching industry, the literature highlights the Oxford Brookes model, which has been specifically developed and tested for the accreditation of internal and external coaches in several UK public sector organisations. The models and approaches discussed in this section seem compelling because they recognise the fundamental principles of coaching that can transform OCs. Hence, if some of these models and approaches were applied to the MPS context, readers and researchers today might be examining the coaching concept through a different lens.

#### **2.4.5 Public Sector Organisational Culture**

Culture can vary from regional, national, and tribal to organisational and coaching culture (Szedlak et al., 2021; Van Wart, 2019). *OC* is described in the literature (Liu & Kianto, 2021; Odor, 2018) as a collection of values, ideas, systems of meaning, symbols, myths, ideologies, and various objects. Simply put, OC refers to a framework for interpreting and evaluating events and objects shared by people from divergent backgrounds with their own unique ways of doing things. This includes rites, rituals,

jargon, traditional customs, metaphors, etc. (Jung, 2014, Kibui, 2015). A few other notable authors (Crozier, 1964; Selznick, 1957; Weber, 1949) have extensively contributed to OC and cultural change in the public sector.

Several commentators (Christensen et al., 2020; Grego-Planer, 2019; Hofmann & Ogonek, 2018; Konrad, 2018) have emphasised that the way public sector organisations operate differs from those of the private sector, as the former prioritise access to finance over operational constraints (economic vs political). Public sector activities are part of a larger government plan to steer the economy and improve people's lives. OC in the public context seems influenced by current political beliefs incompatible with developing goods or providing private sector services.

Odor (2018) describes OC as a product of how one responds to the environment and learns new approaches. This occurs through daily coaching moments and conversations between leaders, teams and peers to create a coaching culture (Schein & Schein, 2019; Whybrow & Nottingham, 2018). According to leading experts in the field (Brahm & Poblete, 2022; Xu et al., 2021), a coaching culture exists in an organisation when coaching is a critical aspect of how leaders, managers, and employees engage, develop all their people and involve their stakeholders. In simple terms, a coaching culture exists when most organisation employees adopt a coaching approach.

There is a clear dearth of consensus among researchers (Bawany, 2015; Gormley & van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; Van Wart, 2019) that a coaching culture fosters a feeling of mutual responsibility, greater networking, more effective leadership techniques and more engagement, which lead to improved outcomes across the board. Kets de Vries' pioneering work on this subject (2008) found that organisations with a strong coaching culture have reduced employee turnover and increased productivity and job satisfaction. According to Bass and Bass (2008), leaders must repair that culture when it becomes dysfunctional.

In this section, the context of OC has been discussed. OC provides a favourable frame of reference for assessing acceptable practices in both the public and private sectors. A coaching culture creates space for daily coaching moments and conversations

between leaders, teams and colleagues. In reviewing the literature, it was interesting to note that OC appears in the executive coaching literature and that the two themes are complementary. The following section presents a broader view of executive coaching related to this study. However, our conclusions will be drawn later after developing a conceptual understanding of the different views and scenarios presented in this research.

## **2.5 THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF EXECUTIVE COACHING**

This section examines the role and impact of executive coaching in relation to objectives 2 and 3 of this study. This section is divided into two parts; subsection 2.5.1 begins with a discussion of the role and impact of executive coaching in practice and research, in which two other important themes will be addressed: qualifications and standards, the value of internal/external coaches, and the potential risks of executive coaching. The final part considers the relationship between executive coaching and managerial effectiveness (2.5.2).

### **2.5.1 Executive Coaching in Practice and Research**

Extensive literature exists on executive coaching. What we know about this topic is based on empirical studies examining how the unique characteristics of the population (executives) and the process (coaching) lead to significant complexity and practical insights (Day et al., 2017; de Haan, 2019). Bozer and Jones (2018) describe executive coaching as a catalytic component that involves one-on-one interventions between a professional coach and an executive (i.e., team leader to top management) to enhance the latter's behavioural change through self-awareness and learning, and ultimately contributing to individual and organisational success for personal development and organisational change in dealing with greater complexity and new responsibilities. Executive coaching has been used as a consultative approach, where agreements are made between the consultant and the executive leader. The literature (Lai & Palmer, 2019; Van Oosten et al., 2019) suggests that the consultant focuses on an executive's productivity, while the coach focuses on a leader's development.

Executive coaching, which incorporates aspects of mentoring (de Haan, 2019), is suitable for managers who have outgrown the conventions of traditional management programmes. In the literature, executive coaches are referred to as external practitioners, while mentors are described as internal members of the organisation – i.e., those who help a younger, less experienced person become competent in their professional role (Tjan, 2017). When comparing the two roles, mentoring has a longer-term approach and a broader view of the person, whereas executive coaching is a short-term intervention focused on specific roles.

According to Tjan (2017), mentoring can be initiated through a reciprocal relationship lasting up to five years. However, executive coaching has a shorter duration (six to eighteen months) and is contracted. As described in the coaching literature (Will et al., 2019), the coaching process consists of six phases. At the request of individuals/organisations, the coach and coachee sign a coaching contract to be legally protected and keep their respective boundaries. The ICF has published a sample coaching contract that is available online (Appendix I).

Based on the available literature (Pekkan, 2018; Peltier, 2011), it can be assumed that the competencies recognised in executive coaching correspond to those in clinical programmes. Bozer and Jones (2018) suggest that executive coaching is used when a new leader is appointed, when the organisation is facing strategic and operational issues, or when there is no opportunity to develop new skills for those interested in developing their career. The only way for SPOs to advance their careers within the MPS is through promotion, which involves an application process followed by an interview or political appointment (Cauchi, 2012; Vella Scicluna, 2015).

The MPS's promotion system used to be based on seniority, which did not consider the actual managerial abilities of the person, but instead awarded promotions to the person next in line (Mullard & Pirotta, 2008). This was a disincentive to public officials. Officers who made the minimal effort were promoted the same way as other officers who cared about their work and always did their best. This system was phased out in the last decade, and today the public administration incorporates performance appraisals and the senior management toolkit (Tabone & Spiteri Gingell, 2013).

Top politicians and government officials abroad regularly take advantage of executive coaching services (Zakaria et al., 2017). Of the bodies that executive coaches aspire to join, the following are well-known in the industry:

- Association for Coaching (AC).
- Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS).
- European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC).
- International Association for Coaching (IAC).
- International Coach Federation (ICF).
- Worldwide Association of Business Executive Coaches (WABC).

(Turner & Passmore, 2018)

These professional associations aim to educate practitioners, encourage knowledge sharing and research, and raise coaching standards at different professional levels (APECS, 2018; AC, 2016). These bodies help established coaches to join professional coaching communities and to benefit from networking and professional development activities (de Haan, 2019).

Based on several notions in the literature (Jones et al., 2018; Nardone et al., 2018), executive coaching is believed to increase engagement and influence self-regulation, behaviour, and work performance. Unfortunately, only a few studies have produced adequate methodological approaches, and there was a lack of a description of the study process (research design, sample size, sampling procedure and description of the methodology). This researcher extracted references over five years to recent articles on the impact of executive coaching ([Table 6](#)).

Table 6: Executive Coaching Impact Research 2014–2019

Author (s)	Key points
Fillery-Travis & Cox (2014)	Identifies the current research position regarding Executive Coaching and explains gaps and future research requirements.
Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck (2014)	Discusses Executive Coaching and identifies its definition and role in organisations. Discusses the philosophy of adult learning and its relevance to coaching.
Bevenour (2015)	Discusses the impact of people in organisations and what professional activities commonly reflect leadership skills.
Steinberg (2016)	Explores what expert performance is, how expert performance can be recognised, and how people in the industry recognise experts.
Steinwedel (2017)	Discusses the use and challenges of projection in organisational coaching, resulting in a critical reflection on oneself – the Coach – and the work she or he does on her or his own inner life.
Greiner (2018)	Talks about HIPOs seeking to learn why coaching works so well and why certain approaches allow leaders in finance, engineering, healthcare and more to achieve impressive results in a relatively short time.
Korotov & Bernhardt (2018)	Presents and discusses cases to the public, offering a unique opportunity to examine internal coaching. The authors comment on aspects in which experts handle ambiguous moments, enabling readers to learn about the methods used to address professional values in coaching assignments.
Foxx (2019)	Discusses the deep human connection to understand the key issues for business leaders and shows exactly how to change one’s heart, attitudes and behaviours to model what great leaders do.
Graf (2019)	Employs the Basic Coaching Activity Model for the qualitative analysis and explains the discursive co-construction of coaching that takes place during coaching sessions with the client.

The breadth of executive coaching research conducted by scholars above shows similarities to professional coaching interventions. The above authors wanted to prove how the industry recognises expert performance compared to traditional coaching norms. They aimed to educate leaders to reflect critically on themselves, improve their behaviour, manage their professional engagement and improve their performance. The authors sought to sensitise managers to the learning theories used in coaching, to strengthen their management and leadership skills.

These studies were chosen because compiling contemporary evidence-based coaching studies would support this thesis in several practical and theoretical ways. For example, short and succinct studies can bridge coaching theory and practice. This kind of

research is essential for academia and practitioner alike. It can help us learn more about the subject and provide insight into other areas that may be related or contain similar concepts. Best practice benchmarking can be useful for practitioners working in organisations that commission coaching or other professional development programmes.

Executive coaching has become increasingly popular, despite limited empirical evidence for its impact. There has been little agreement about which executive coaching approach should be followed, and there has been wide disagreement about necessary or desired professional qualifications for coaches. The problem is not the practice *per se* but the lack of research and theory to advance the field.

### ***Qualifications and Standards***

Professional bodies designing certification systems may need to embrace a method with broader capabilities to reflect coaching's complexity. Examining how other demanding professions have dealt with a similar issue of assuring the quality of service could be beneficial (Culver et al., 2019). One way to tackle quality is to expand the role of coaching supervision through entrance-point evaluation and frequent 'fit for practice' assessments. Although no methods are flawless, it must be highlighted that complicated professions do not rely simply on competency framework assessments as a rite of passage into the field (Littler, 2020).

It has been found that, in addition to belonging (or not belonging) to diverse groups, coaches vary significantly in their academic training and professional qualifications. According to Kjellström et al. (2020), some coaches have a psychological background, while others have little formal education but extensive leadership experience. Different viewpoints have been applied to the value of psychological education and its impact on coaching outcomes (Passmore & Lai, 2020). Many coaching styles are available (including behavioural, cognitive-behavioural, systemic, gestalt, and PC), which means coaching can be a highly individualised intervention.

Schutte (2019) reports that 13% of executive coaches worldwide have a bachelor's degree, and 8% have a high school diploma. Some other recent scholars (Ghardallou et al., 2020; Urquhart & Zhang, 2022) show that many executives today also have an

MBA or a PhD. While some authors, as noted in the literature, state that managers in organisations have such credentials and certifications, others (e.g., Graßmann et al., 2020) complained about the recent influx of uneducated managers who lack coaching qualifications and do not adhere to the required standards.

Despite calls for clarity regarding coaching qualifications and standardisation, Pepinsky et al. (2017) claim that excessive use of these measures tends to bureaucratise people's development. The MPS structures and systems in Malta are still rigid, even though the Maltese Government has appointed a commissioner to oversee them (simplification.gov.mt, 2019). As the situation stands, SPOs are only valued if they contribute to the traditional values and follow the bureaucratic structures and systems of the MPS (Ellul et al., 2015). There is no point in proposing a more participatory leadership style if the systems and structures within the MPS do not allow for such participation (Cauchi, 2012; Law & Aquilina, 2013). The efforts of most research groups are concentrated on moving away from the old paradigm of command, control and compliance to a paradigm that focuses on inclusion, engagement and participation (Torfing et al., 2020).

### ***The Value of the Internal/External Coach***

According to a 2014 study conducted by the ICF and the Human Capital Institute, more companies have recognised the value of developing a coaching culture that enables employees at all levels (not just managers and executives) to develop their skills, values, and meets their professional goals (Van Wart, 2019). Individual, group and team coaching are examples of external and internal coaching.

Hiring external coaches is not easily accessible due to cost factors and high levels of expertise, but formal coaches know how the corporate world works and are not overwhelmed by organisational challenges. Some scholars (Hastings & Pennington, 2019; Schalk & Landeta, 2017) claim these coaches are trained and have completed several accredited programmes offered by ICF, IPEC and other professional bodies. In comparison, internal coaches understand the coachees' problems because they speak the language of the organisation. Some organisations view internal coaching as human resource development performed by a full-time professional working for the same

organisation to cultivate other leaders and help them face challenges with optimism (Smith, 2021; St John-Brooks, 2019).

One of the most significant drawbacks of using internal coaches is the lack of coaching and cross-organisational knowledge (Jahnke, 2019). Some organisations prefer internal coaches (St John-Brooks, 2019), while others favour external coaches (Hastings & Pennington, 2019). The CIPD (2015) reported that internal coaching is more prevalent in large British corporations, whilst external coaching is more common in smaller entities.

As noted in various sections of this project, the industry's lack of training and standardisation is central to the whole executive coaching issue. The literature suggests that coaches with different educational backgrounds and work experience do not need a coaching qualification. The profession's reputation seems to be in jeopardy due to the recent influx of untrained coaches and the lack of standardisation in the coaching discipline. This researcher investigated whether senior leaders within MPS have executive coaches or mentors but found none.

### ***Potential Risks of Executive Coaching***

Several studies (Ives et al., 2021; Murray et al., 2018; Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019; Yip et al., 2020) suggest that coaching is influenced by power and social relationships. Since most executive coaches were businesspeople in their earlier lives, they will probably find it much easier to access top talent (de Haan et al., 2020). These 'corporate-type coaches' are seniors with business knowledge who can impress corporate CEOs. However, they can abuse their power and gain a Svengali-like influence over the executives they coach and the CEOs they report, sometimes with disastrous consequences (Campagna, 2020; Carlson, 2022).

Some studies (Garvey et al., 2017; Turner & Palmer, 2018) show that less than half of the world's most respected coaches belong to professional associations such as AC, APECS, EMCC, ICF and WABC. Critics (Hofmann & Ogonek, 2018; Kuziemski & Misuraca, 2020) argue that despite these professional bodies' emphasis on standardisation and ethical principles, most practitioners are not self-regulated and

trained. Such practitioners promote themselves as experts and go into coaching for the wrong reasons (Kets de Vries & Rook, 2018).

Other researchers (Bettis et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2018) point out that while coaches are expected to help with the emergence of learning through coaching activities, the preceding discussions imply that such coaches require no qualifications or a high level of expertise. A critical shortcoming reported in the literature is that some existing coaches come from a business background and, because of their experience, downplay or ignore psychological issues they do not understand (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019).

### **2.5.2 Executive Coaching and Managerial Effectiveness**

Whether executive coaching can be a leadership development tool to improve managerial effectiveness has sparked much debate over the years (Kuna, 2019). The academic community has linked managerial effectiveness to interpersonal skills, competence and leadership behaviour (Grant, 2017; Matsuo et al., 2020). Many organisations have leadership competency frameworks based on classic leadership notions (i.e., management traits and technical aptitude). According to Knight and Paterson (2018), organisations worldwide rely on workplace performance appraisals to identify HIPO employees.

Over the past half-century, a comprehensive study of leadership behaviour has reported various behavioural taxonomies that have replaced the word ‘manager’ with ‘coach’ to indicate a commitment to cultural change. [Table 7](#) illustrates the clusters and behavioural taxonomies discovered by Beattie (2002) and Ellinger and Bostrom (2002). These two perspectives were chosen because they examine the specific problems faced by leaders acting as coaches. They recognise the importance of clarifying views about managerial responsibilities and competencies and about learning processes and learners. These viewpoints combine the difficulties that SPOs may face in identifying management and organisational deficiencies within the MPS.

Table 7: Behavioural Taxonomies

Ellinger and Bostrom's (2002) Behavioural Taxonomy	Beattie's (2002) Behavioural Taxonomy
<p>The empowering cluster consists of these behaviours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Question framing to encourage employees to think through issues.</li> <li>• Being a resource – removing obstacles.</li> <li>• Transferring ownership to employees.</li> <li>• Holding back – not providing the answers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking – reflective or prospective thinking.</li> <li>• Informing – sharing knowledge.</li> <li>• Empowering – delegation, trust.</li> <li>• Assessing – feedback and recognition, identifying developmental needs.</li> <li>• Advising – instruction, coaching, guidance, counselling.</li> <li>• Being a professional – role model, standard-setting, planning and preparation.</li> <li>• Caring – support, encouragement, approachability, reassurance, commitment/involvement, empathy.</li> <li>• Developing others.</li> <li>• Challenging employees to stretch themselves.</li> </ul>
<p>The facilitating cluster consists of these behaviours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing feedback to employees.</li> <li>• Soliciting feedback from employees.</li> <li>• Working it out together – talking it through.</li> <li>• Creating and promoting a learning environment.</li> <li>• Setting and communicating expectations.</li> <li>• Stepping into others' shoes to shift perspectives.</li> <li>• Broadening employees' perspectives – getting them to see things differently.</li> <li>• Using analogies and examples.</li> <li>• Engaging others to facilitate learning.</li> </ul>	

While authors are aware of the coaching opportunities in their day-to-day managerial work and what constitutes effective and ineffective coaching behaviours, researchers may need a clear and shared understanding of how the same content description can represent diverse types of coaching content. These issues could be addressed using an entire classification system with agreed-upon definitions to describe implementation measures.

There are a few variations in how 'manager as coach' is practised (see subsection 2.4.2, p.45). A manager (as coach) can apply coaching skills in a one-on-one interview, with a co-worker (coachee), or with multiple co-workers (coachees) in a group context. Coaching skills may be used where a different directive approach is needed and where managers coach people outside their team (Grant, 2017; Matsuo et al., 2020).

Most successful managers coach their subordinates in ways they are sometimes unaware of. The manager does not use coaching to the full extent, as an experienced coach does, but in partial aspects (Schalk & Landeta, 2017; Will et al., 2019). According to Goldring et al. (2018), as cited by Coleman (2021), managers benefit most from coaching when they are on the job with experienced colleagues. As coaches, managers invest time in their employees to build their confidence in carrying out new tasks and developing strategic plans. They strive to apply coaching principles that help achieve organisational goals (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Grant, 2017).

Mintzberg's (1973) views on management effectiveness seem to align well with Ladyshevsky and Taplin's (2018) descriptions of the managerial roles that make organisations look prosperous. Like Mintzberg, authors such as Al Harbiet et al. (2019) have also linked managerial effectiveness to interpersonal relationships, beliefs, inspiration, innovation, goal attainment, motivation and relationships.

Various authors (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Ghavidel et al., 2019; Grant, 2017) have claimed that managers have all the competencies and are suitable for their leadership role, but this does not mean they also have the credentials and competencies to coach people. Professional coaching organisations (e.g., AC, ECMC and ICF) have been set up to promote a better understanding of the approaches and skills used in professional coaching. However, there is scant agreement on what constitutes a 'professional coach' or whether coaches require specific skills, training or accreditations. These coaching organisations have developed coaching competencies in a set of guidelines to give a frame of reference for coaching evaluations (Coupet et al., 2020; Foster, 2021).

Suliman et al. (2022) used a multifactorial questionnaire in their study to assess the impact of management and leadership effectiveness. The results showed that coaching was necessary and scored well in the evaluations. While organisations are likely to be aware of the importance of evaluating coaching, the lack of systematic evaluation may be due to the nature of leadership coaching. The evaluation process is complex and made more difficult by the demands of various stakeholders, the requirement for summative evaluation to consider proximal and distal outcomes, the requirement for formative evaluation, and the variety of data sources and approaches.

As coaching is a one-on-one intervention, each programme is unique, based on the client and the client’s organisation. Even the more traditional training method of conducting an assessment at the end of coaching misses the organic and dynamic nature of the coaching intervention, which evolves over time in response to the client’s successes and failures. Some traditional evaluation methods may not work because of the difficulty of finding the right people to evaluate; this is most effective with small sample sizes. Clients probably do not work towards the same development goals even within the same organisation. Also, coaching interventions are longer than traditional organisational training and last for several months (Woods, 2016), which makes it hard to compare groups. In the literature, evaluation in the face of such issues calls for a more rigorous methodology.

Since executive coaching is an indispensable tool for increasing managerial effectiveness, it would help to examine how managers can become effective coaches. The literature (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Grant, 2017) suggests that one cannot be a good leader unless s/he is a good coach. According to Stern (2019), a good coach should have a ‘keen mind’ and the ability to think and be ‘above average intelligence’. Such attributes are listed in [Table 8](#) below.

Table 8: Characteristics of Good Coaching Attributes

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>Experience</b>
Openness	Confronting	Business world Coaching
Respect	Giving feedback	
Empathy	Non-pedantic	
Commitment	Mirroring	
Being present	Listening	
Honest	Stimulating problem-solving	
Sounding board	behaviour	
Non-judgemental	Helpful and giving psychological	
Self-disclosure	support	
Role model	Using techniques	

(Source: Augustijnen, Schnitzer & van Esbroeck, 2011:159)

Alternative research identifies different qualities of effective coaching: for example, a sincere interest in the client, discretion, effective coaching techniques, and adaptability

(Aguilar, 2020; Malone, 2021; Richard, 2020). Passmore and Lai (2020) emphasise listening, reflection, self-awareness, coaching, ethics, interpersonal communication, and support. Gillham (2022) takes an intriguing hybrid approach that integrates academic knowledge in psychology, coaching experience, business acumen, professionalism, honesty, objectivity, confidentiality, listening skills, and intellect. Qualitative studies have shown that trust, empathy, respect, and confidentiality are the foundations of a successful coaching relationship (Middour-Oxler et al., 2022; Shahmalak et al., 2019). An effective coaching programme supports the educator by incorporating four essential components: community, relationships, accountability, and leadership (DeWalt & Mayberry, 2019; Edwards et al., 2016).

Besides the coaching attributes required for effective management, Goleman and Nevarez (2018) point out that emotional intelligence (EI) is one of the key attributes for managerial effectiveness. Emotional intelligence is based on the following four elements:

1. Self-awareness (the ability to read one's own emotions and those of others to achieve the desired outcome).
2. Self-management (the ability to control one's feelings and desires and adapt to changing circumstances).
3. Social awareness (the ability to feel, perceive and respond to the emotions of others while recognising social networks).
4. Relationship management (the ability to encourage, influence and improve people's behaviour in the face of conflict).

Although a lack of agreement about the concept can be seen as a factor reducing the construct validity of EI, the existence of its multiple theoretical approaches should not be interpreted as a sign of conceptual weakness but rather as a sign of robustness and theoretical maturity (Goleman & Nevarez, 2018). The coexistence of diverse approaches to studying emotional competencies and abilities reveals a new and emerging discipline that seeks an adequate scientific explanation for the processes of interrelationships between cognition and emotion from multiple perspectives. This enables scientists to incorporate nuanced distinctions in their proposals, verify the

capabilities, analyse the compatibility of the methodologies, and refine the methods and tools for assessing EI (Yuan et al., 2019).

This section has explored the concepts of executive coaching and managerial effectiveness. Managerial effectiveness has long been defined in terms of interpersonal skills, competence, and leadership. Other authors linked managerial effectiveness to interpersonal relationships, motivation and relationship building. A good coach is described in the literature as someone with a keen mind, who can think multi-dimensionally, and who has above-average intelligence. We learn from the literature that professional coaching organisations (e.g., AC, ECMC and ICF) have long promoted managerial effectiveness in the workplace. The coexistence of different approaches allows researchers to learn more about executive coaches who may need to incorporate emotional competencies into their work practices and refine the methods and tools used for evaluation.

## **2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has covered a wide range of subjects based on British, American, and Maltese sources. A comprehensive literature search was conducted to achieve this study's aims and objectives. This accumulated literature will be interlinked with the research results in Chapter 4. The current state of knowledge in this field has been developed by practitioners focusing on how coaching works in organisations and how to carve a distinct niche for coaching development. Common themes previously discussed in the literature included the coach-client relationship, the coaching process, coaching outcomes, coaching practices, and teaching theories. The critical debates in this literature review concerned diversity in coaching and OC, leadership and executive coaching, learning theories, and managerial effectiveness.

Existing research suggests that coaching is an advanced form of leadership based on learning concepts that confirm theories and evidence-based studies. It is clear from the available evidence that the role of the leader today is becoming complex, as the dilemmas of public and private institutions and society are changing on many fronts. Notable leadership theorists have stated that coaches working in leadership, like the leaders they coach, need to develop resonance relationships with the people they lead.

The adult-learning experience provides great insight into the strategies and processes that coaches can employ to help their coachees make a significant impact. The emphasis on coaching models and techniques provides a framework for researchers and reflective practitioners to make sure future studies are based on earlier work that recognises people's desire to learn.

While coaching encompasses various models that have enriched the coaching landscape, some approaches add value to coaching, such as behavioural coaching and the psychodynamic approach, the PC approach, positive psychology, and the SF and humanistic approaches. The coexistence of different approaches enables researchers to learn that executive coaches might need to incorporate emotional competencies as part of their working practices and to refine the methods and tools used for evaluation, to enhance managerial effectiveness. The academic community has linked managerial effectiveness to interpersonal skills, competence and leadership behaviour. However, there is scant agreement on what constitutes a 'professional coach' or whether coaches require specific skills, training or accreditations. These coaching organisations have developed coaching competencies in a set of guidelines to give a frame of reference for coaching evaluations.

From this review, it appears that the gaps found in the literature are methodological, conceptual and epistemological. This study aims to fill these gaps by identifying the competencies needed to improve management and leadership effectiveness within MPS. The following chapter presents the research methodology, which specifies the methods used to generate empirical material in response to this independent research project's stated aims and objectives.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

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*There's no discovery without a search,  
and there's no rediscovery without research.  
Every discovery man ever made has always been concealed.  
It takes searchers and researchers to unveil them.  
That's what makes an insightful leader.*

—Benjamin Suulola

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into fifteen sections. Section 3.1 is the introduction to the chapter, followed by an outline of the research paradigm (3.2), the research philosophies that underpin this research (3.3), and the research approaches (3.4). Section 3.5 explains the research design, followed by the study's research strategy (3.6). Section 3.7 outlines the target population, and section 3.8 describes the sampling and design. Section 3.9 anticipates the ethical considerations discussed in this research. Section 3.10 describes the procedures followed by the researcher, including the strategies used to achieve trustworthiness (3.11). The rest of this chapter discusses the role of the researcher in this research (3.12) and the instruments used for the study (3.13), and the risks and limitations (3.14), with a chapter summary in section 3.15.

## 3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study used a constructivist interpretive paradigm (people-centred approach) embedded in a pragmatic research paradigm (mixed-methods). This research paradigm is based on assumptions about the researcher's perspective on reality (Bogna et al., 2020). A constructivist-interpretative approach took account of the author's insight as an SPO within the Maltese Public Service (MPS), a doctoral student, and an insider researcher. It allowed the researcher to access and understand the views of study subjects (SPOs and ICIs). Combining multiple data sets helped the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the situation and provided more thorough results.

This research reflects the aspects in which study subjects were involved in the public sector environment; thus, it has an ontological position that highlights the diversity of interpretations familiar to the coaching world and the epistemological position of the researcher from a social science perspective that seeks to interpret the perceptions and practices of study subjects (Willig, 2019). Exploring and identifying the participants' unique and subjective views on the skills gaps and purpose of coaching in Maltese settings contributed to this study by providing multiple perspectives, each arising from an individual interpretation of the circumstances in which their coaching roles take place.

### **3.3 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY**

This section sets out the theories that underpin the methods used in this research. Research philosophy is a way of thinking that enables new, reliable insights into the research topic. It is divided into three main categories: (i) What exists? (ontology); (ii) How do we know? (epistemology); and (iii) What is value? (axiology, praxeology). Science transforms what is supposed to be understood into knowledge, i.e., from *doxa* to *episteme* in Greek (Borowiecki & Siuta-Tokarska, 2019) – meaning, from a state of forming an opinion to the ability to question and reason about what one believes.

Research such as this offers flexibility in reformulating the researcher's prior knowledge and understanding of the research process. The philosophy is that the researcher has a unique function in observing and interpreting the social reality and that s/he can never be neutral or detached from the study (Farghaly, 2018). This researcher was implicated in the studied phenomena through the different data collection techniques to understand the existing systems of meaning shared by study subjects and interpret the actions and events they recount. Hence, the researcher partly creates the reality he studies through the constructs used to view the world. As an insider working within the MPS, the researcher deeply understands the study's context and draws interpretations outsiders would not make.

*Interpretivism:* The interpretivist approach relies on instruments such as interviews and observations. Interpretations usually emerge towards the end of the research process (Collins, 2018; Myers, 2019). In this study, the primary data focused on the

views of study subjects (SPOs and ICIs) to learn more about the different types of coaching and the gaps they can fill in the coaching literature. An online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were chosen to obtain contrasting views. In this research, the seven principles of interpretive research by Klein and Myers (1999) (Table 9) were followed.

This investigation takes a mixed-methods approach informed by a constructivist interpretive paradigm (people-centred approach), embedded in a pragmatic research paradigm (mixed methods). As a philosophical stance, positivism and interpretivism were considered for learning what SPOs and Independent Coach Instructors (ICIs) do and what practices do they follow.

Table 9: Klein and Myers' (1999) Seven Principles of Interpretive Research

Group	No.	Principle	Explanation
Fundamental	1	The fundamental principle of the <b>hermeneutic circle</b> .	All human understanding is achieved by iterating between the interdependent meaning of the parts and the whole they form. This principle is <b>fundamental</b> to all other principles.
Critical reflection	2	The principle of <b>contextualisation</b> .	Requires <b>critical reflection</b> on the social and historical background of the research context; the audience should be able to see how the situation under investigation emerged.
	3	The principle of <b>interaction</b> between the researchers and the participants.	Requires <b>critical reflection</b> on how the data was socially constructed through interaction between the researcher(s) and participants.
Philosophical framework	4	The principle of abstraction and <b>generalisation</b> .	Requires relating the idiographic details revealed by data interpretation through applying principles 1 and 2 to theoretical, general concepts that describe the nature of human understanding and social interaction.

Sensitivity issues	5	The principle of <b>dialogical reasoning</b> .	Requires <b>sensitivity</b> to possible contradictions between the theoretical preconceptions guiding the research design and actual findings during subsequent cycles of revision. The data needs to tell a story.
	6	The principle of <b>multiple interpretations</b> .	Requires <b>sensitivity</b> to possible differences in interpretations among participants, as expected in multiple narratives or stories of the same sequence of events under study.
	7	The principle of <b>suspicion</b> .	Requires <b>sensitivity</b> to possible 'biases' and systematic 'distortions' in narratives collected from participants.

(Source: Klein & Myers, 1999)

*Pragmatism:* Pragmatism is concerned with action and change and the interaction between knowledge and action (e.g., Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). According to the philosophy of pragmatism, research questions are essential determinants and involve using mixed methods to gain new insights. In this research, the mixed-methods approach, as defined by Caracelli and Greene (1997), was also followed. Mixed-methods research based on pragmatism combines elements of different research paradigms into a single approach (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatism is not only interested in what 'is' but also in what 'might be'; an orientation towards a prospective, not yet realised world. The knowledge within pragmatism is not limited to explaining (a key form of positivism) and understanding (a key form of interpretivism). Other forms of knowledge, such as prescriptive (giving guidelines), normative (exhibiting values), and prospective (suggesting possibilities), are also essential in pragmatism (Ofemile, 2018).

*Positivism:* The basic principle of positivism is that an empirical study requires observations and measurements worthy of scientific investigation (Coolican, 2017; Park et al., 2020). The positivity approach is both deductive and inductive, but most importantly, it focuses on research that tests theories. The findings from these experiments lead to the development of laws which can explain various aspects of life with a high-level accuracy rate. The advantage of a positivist approach is that data is

collected on a single occasion, making it easy to predict plans, times and schedules. The disadvantages of positivism are that the approach relies on experience as a valid source of knowledge. It does not consider intangible concepts such as feelings and emotions and how these may contribute to aspects of behaviour (Bryman, 2016: 13). Despite its flaws, positivism is still a research paradigm. The first considerations in this study were whether to draw broad generalisations that can be captured by statistics and conduct quantitative research or to focus on the attitudes and values of the target population and conduct qualitative research (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

*Transformational Process:* Through a process of transformation, the usefulness of the mixed-methods design, according to Caracelli and Greene (1997), allows the researcher to:

- (i) Determine whether results from different instruments are consistent.

The triangulation design used in the mixed-methods research allowed an equal consideration of qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher combined two data-gathering approaches (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) to strengthen the study's reliability and validity.

- (ii) Transfer results from one method to another.

Transferring 'methods might relate to changing qualitative analysis into quantitative techniques for better data collection. Mixed-methods research can be transferred to another field, as studies often use multiple methods to measure the same or similar research questions. This researcher described the context and assumptions that were central to the research. This study's findings could apply to other contexts, situations, and times by using a conceptual framework model as presented in Chapter 5, along with an empirical research-based GROW coaching programme influenced by this work's contribution, as referred to in Chapter 6.

- (iii) Show how the results from one method can be tested with other methods in future.

Future researchers might find the present study useful as a guide to mixed-methods studies. This researcher performed one set of analyses with another and improved interferences by triangulating results from both types, which can also help improve validity in future work on this topic area.

The transformational design in this study is an active process where participants are involved in the research itself, and its findings provide valuable insights for community members, stakeholders or policymakers (Chen et al., 2018). Reflections on interpretive research with mixed methods are detailed in Appendix J.

We will now explore other philosophical approaches which fall under the umbrella of interpretivism, namely: axiology, epistemology, ontology, and realism.

*Axiology (nature/types of value):* Axiology is concerned with evaluating the role of the researcher in all phases of the research process (Frunză, 2017). This research seeks to understand the study subjects' views about the value of coaching as a form of professional development to guide future action. In this study, the value of coaching could be seen as both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsically, the study subjects may view coaching as valuable for personal growth and development. Extrinsically, the value of coaching can be seen in terms of its impact on improving job performance and, ultimately, its contribution to the overall effectiveness of the MPS.

*Epistemology:* This philosophy is concerned with the question of what knowledge is. Sources of knowledge include intuitive, human-emotional, authorial, logical, and empirical (Lougheed, 2018). This research used a literature review and primary data as knowledge sources. Dealing with epistemological questions and the nature of knowledge is aligned with the duality of positivism and phenomenology (Mathotaarachchi & Thilakarathna, 2021). In a phenomenological study, the research topic is examined from the perspective of the lived experience of study subjects. In section 3.12 of this chapter, the role of the researcher in the study is described, followed by a personal reflection, which will be reproduced in Chapter 6, section 6.8.

*Ontology:* Ontology is a form of philosophy that explains 'the science or study of being' and is concerned with the concept of reality (Myers & Klein, 2011) and the

essence of being. It is a significant element of the research process in terms of how one views reality, informed by the focus of the study, the methods chosen, and more importantly, how one interprets or analyses the collected data. As defined by Corbetta (2003:12), ontology is

... the question of 'what.' It regards the nature and form of social reality. It asks if the world of social phenomena is a real and objective world endowed with an autonomous existence outside the human mind and independent from the interpretation given to it by the subject. Therefore, it asks if social phenomena are 'things in their own right' or 'representations of things.' The problem is linked to the more general philosophical question of the existence of things and the external world. Indeed, the existence of an idea in mind tells us nothing about the existence of the object, just as a painting of a unicorn does not prove the existence of unicorns.

In simple terms, this concerns the fundamental question of whether social phenomena should be viewed objectively or subjectively (Baker, 2019). Subjectivism implies that social phenomena are shaped through the perspective of social actors (Nakashololo & Iyamu, 2019) and that they are produced by the perceptions and subsequent behaviours of the social actors interested in their existence (Al-Ababneh, 2020). This can be viewed as an ongoing process, so these social phenomena are constantly being reviewed and improved through social interactions. Subjectivist approaches to social science are based on the idea that reality is purely what people make of it (Morgan and Smircich, 1980:492). Table 10 below summarises Morgan and Smircich's 'network of underlying assumptions constituting dispute within social science' (1980:492).



viewpoint suggests that research methodologies have distinct clusters of ontological and epistemological commitments. The choice and appropriateness of methods involve various assumptions about knowledge, the methods for obtaining knowledge, and a range of assumptions about the phenomena being investigated (Vogl et al., 2019).

Given the challenges of making the tacit explicit, SPOs could be taught to use philosophical tools better to understand their own coaching and coaching in general. The most commonly used method to attempt this process has been coach interviews (Stodter & Cushion, 2019), with research investigating elite coaches in performance contexts (e.g., McCosker et al., 2021). Researchers have also used surveys (e.g., Nayak & Narayan, 2019) and document analysis of personal statements or reflective writing (e.g., Lam et al., 2019) to determine the opinions of coaches to understand their work and their philosophy.

While acknowledging that coaches often lack the sufficient philosophical understanding to articulate the values underpinning their thoughts and actions (Baker, 2019), researchers present a paradox by assuming that ‘expert’ coaches naturally become more reflexive while still emphasising the need to ‘trigger’ coaches’ internal conversations through questioning (Park et al., 2020), but without articulating the assumptions underpinning such questions.

### **3.4 RESEARCH APPROACHES**

This section explores joint scientific research approaches and describes their applicability to this study. The three main research approaches are deductive, inductive, and abductive; they have received significant critical attention in choosing specific research methods. Percy et al. (2015) state that both deductive and inductive techniques are data-driven. Deductive approaches tend to be quantitative, whereas inductive methods are qualitative. Sometimes, the inductive method is linked to quantitative research (Fischer & Guzel, 2022).

A deductive method (alternatively referred to as deductive reasoning) involves generating a hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on an existing theory and then

developing a research technique to test it, such as correlational analysis, mean, mode and median, among others (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018).

The inductive approach (also known as inductive reasoning) deals with patterns derived from observations and theories regarding a set of hypotheses. Although inductive research recognises that theory emerges from the data collection and analysis, deduction relies on already established theories to develop the hypothesis (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018). This research does not aim to test a theory but to explore principles that could be applied to the scope of this research.

The abductive approach (also known as abductive reasoning) aims to resolve the difficulties associated with inductive and deductive approaches. In abductive reasoning, the researcher tries to find the ‘best’ interpretation of multiple hypothetical explanations to describe ‘surprising facts’ or ‘puzzles’ at the beginning of the research process. According to Tanweer et al. (2021), abductive reasoning is increasingly seen as an essential part of interpretive research.

This research aimed to determine whether coaching could be used as a professional learning opportunity (amongst other active forms of PD) to help reduce the significant gap in skills within the MPS. Findings revealed that the only Ministry within the Office of the Prime Minister (MSD) micro-managed all MPS activities. The findings in Chapter 4 reconfirm the position of the 2017 and 2018 European Commission (EC) reports for Malta, revealing the significant leadership skills gaps in the health, finance, and ICT sectors (theme 1, subtheme 1).

The puzzles or conundrums found in the findings section involved behavioural and trust issues (theme 5, subtheme 2) and accommodating a transactional culture of ‘telling’ (theme 6, subtheme 2) within the MPS, resulting in low morale and service effectiveness.

It can be deduced from the study that the barriers to developing a coaching culture within the MPS (theme 6, subtheme 3) do not primarily lie in senior management but in mid-management levels (theme 4, subtheme 2). Politicians often control programmes and activities, and most SPOs feel marginalised and less inclined to take

part in their personal development. These negative factors cause MPS to show signs of poor organisational culture (OC), ineffective leadership, inefficient recruitment strategy, and a lack of vision and core values.

The most inductive elements in this study concerned aspects related to the absence of training and coaching programmes within the MPS (theme 5, subtheme 3). Transformative coaching practices invite people to engage with life on a deeper level, encourage them to explore their limiting, ego-based self-identities and create lasting changes into new and expansive ways of being. Another inductive element for MPS is the lack of good governance. This is embedded in and exacerbated by a broader culture of nepotism, corruption, and the ‘political’ appointment of people unqualified for their roles (theme 4, subtheme 3).

### **3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Before deciding which research methods to use, this researcher considered three crucial factors: (i) the nature of the research aims and research questions; (ii) the methodological approaches in earlier studies and literature; and (iii) practicalities and constraints (workforce and available facilities). The researcher evaluated how the method would address the aims and how he could proceed accordingly. He sought academically reliable, valid and feasible methods, scientifically sound and potentially yielding the desired results that could add to the existing knowledge of the subject. Thus, the researcher linked the research questions, aims and objectives to ensure that a single line or golden thread ran through the study. The research design for this piece of research was influenced by the research onion (Figure 6) from Saunders et al. (2015).

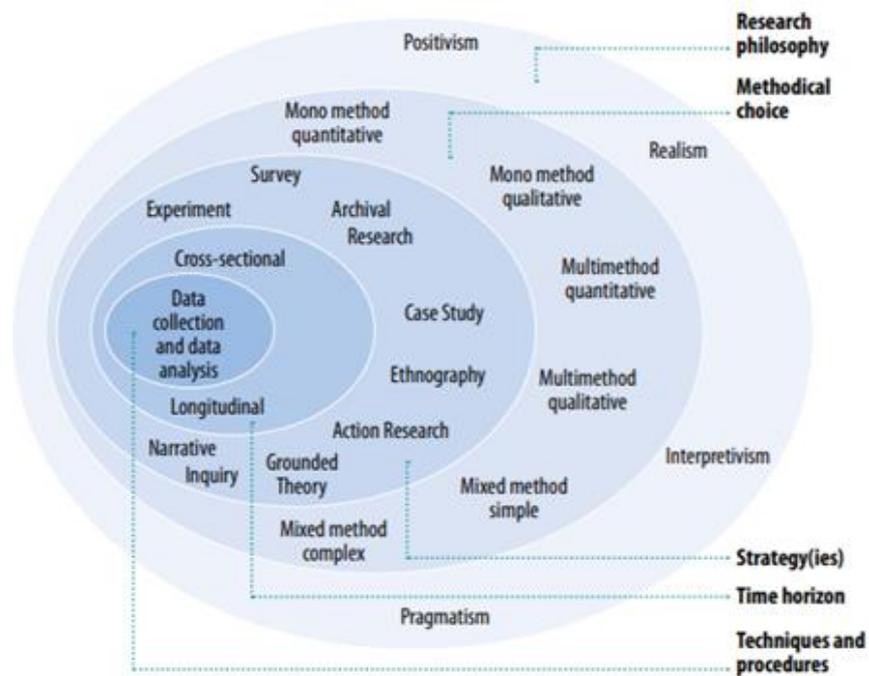


Figure 6: Two Broad Research Traditions  
 (Source: Saunders et al., 2015)

The study needed to consider what methods could best provide results that would be academically reliable and valid. The primary consideration was how the information would be gathered and how this could later be analysed efficiently and methodically. For example, would it have been possible to conduct a quantitative study on the subject at hand, despite the limited data sample? Or would a qualitative study make it too cumbersome to analyse the gathered data in the time distributed for the research? [Table 11](#) below illustrates the two broad research traditions featuring qualitative and quantitative methodical approaches, as defined by Miles and Huberman (1994:40).

Table 11: Qualitative vs Quantitative Research

<b>Qualitative Research</b>	<b>Quantitative Research</b>
The aim is a complete, detailed description.	The aim is to classify features, count them and construct statistical models to explain what is observed.
The researcher may only know roughly in advance what s/he is looking for.	The researcher knows clearly in advance what s/he is looking for.
Recommended during earlier phases of research projects.	Recommended during the latter phases of research projects.
The design emerges as the study unfolds.	All aspects of the study are carefully designed before data is collected.
The researcher is the data-gathering instrument.	The researcher uses tools, such as questionnaires or equipment, to collect numerical data.
Data is in words, pictures or objects.	Data is in numbers and statistics.
Subjective – individuals’ interpretation of events is important, e.g., uses participant observation, in-depth interviews etc.	Objective: seeks precise measurement & analysis of target concepts, e.g., uses surveys, questionnaires, etc.
Qualitative data is ‘richer,’ time-consuming, and less able to be generalised.	Quantitative data is more efficient and can test hypotheses but may miss contextual detail.
The researcher becomes subjectively immersed in the subject matter.	The researcher remains objectively separated from the subject.

(Source: Miles & Huberman, 1994:40)

The mixed-methods approach was chosen for this research because it allowed the researcher to explore both quantitative and qualitative approaches. From a reflection of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the researcher used an online survey and in-depth interviews. These approaches offer unique perspectives and will contribute more towards a comprehensive understanding than just one method could provide alone. A survey approach has two main purposes: (i) to identify community traits or attributes or (ii) to evaluate hypotheses about relationships within a population (Kavzoglu et al., 2019). Evaluation is a systematic method of gathering information to figure out if the practices used are viable, such as an evaluation process that examines the alignment of a coaching activity with organisational strategy to ensure management and leadership effectiveness (Kamenetzky & Hinrichs-Krapels, 2020). Coaching can be embedded in profound social and psychological processes that merit evaluation in an organisational setting (Appendix K). This study, however, applied the first objective.

## **3.6 RESEARCH STRATEGY**

This section is divided into two subsections: 3.6.1 discusses the mixed-methods research approach for this study, and 3.6.2 presents the alternative research methods that were also considered.

### **3.6.1 Mixed-Methods Research**

Consideration was given to whether a mixed approach could give the research study a multi-dimensional perspective on the realities sought. This methodological approach can be transferred to another field, as studies often use multiple methods to measure the same or similar research questions. A mixed-method approach resolves the opposing and conflicting viewpoints of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms (González Rey & Mitjás Martínez, 2019; Silverman, 2020), with the scope to explore the lived reality and value perspectives of study subjects and then extend this knowledge with the added benefits of a broader study, to generate more general insights. Under the chosen methods (mixed methods), quantitative data was collected through an online SurveyMonkey questionnaire with 222 SPOs operating in the health, finance, ICT and digital media sectors within the MPS. Qualitative data was then collected from 20 ICIs using semi-structured interviews.

### **3.6.2 Alternative Research Methods Considered**

Before adopting the mixed-methods research strategy outlined above, three other methods were considered and rejected. These were focus groups, participant observation, and action research.

Focus groups involve up to ten people and can uncover valuable insights in as little as ninety minutes. They provide a unique opportunity to develop information as individuals' responses build on one another. However, focus groups may not be appropriate in certain circumstances, mainly when they involve confidentiality issues or group disagreements. Respondents may raise issues in front of the group related to a culture of bullying: for example, lack of trust and emotional cues to quit their job. This may leave participants feeling humiliated, ignored or attacked (Guest et al., 2017).

With participant observation, it would be possible to ‘see through their eyes’ and gain insights into the environment in which they performed their coaching role and record behaviours that coaches take for granted and are not discussed in an interview (Bryman, 2016).

Action research could have provided an opportunity to examine coaches more closely and change their perception of their role (Voldby & Klein-Døssing, 2020). Working with coaches would have let the researcher learn about the difficulties they encounter as coaches and find solutions together. This technique could potentially increase the author’s knowledge of coaching methods in Malta, but it was rejected since gaining access to the coaches was difficult.

Two more issues led to the choice of the survey/interview technique over the other mentioned research methods. The first was the researcher’s role, which required him to communicate with multiple study participants. It was believed that without such a strategy, the study’s sample size and demographic diversity would have been limited. Another concern was maintaining their anonymity while spending time with coaches, observing their work, and interacting with their clients. Finally, the decision was made not to use focus groups, participant observation or an action research strategy because the risk of losing study subjects before the research could be completed was considered unacceptably high.

## **3.7 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

### **3.7.1 Target Population**

A target population is a collection of potential research participants with shared experiences and characteristics related to the subject of investigation (Asiamah et al., 2017). The target population is divided into subgroups called strata, each sampled separately. Strata are used when we anticipate that different segments of the target population will respond differently to the queries or when researchers expect segments of the target population to have varying proportions. Thus, a stratified random sample provides more accuracy than a simple random sample of the same size. It allows a reduced sample size, resulting in cost savings, and it may avoid using an ‘unrepresentative’ sample (e.g., an all-male sample from a mixed-sex population). It

also emphasises that researchers must obtain enough sample points to analyse each subgroup (Jager et al., 2017). In this study, the target population for the quantitative survey was mid-management level employees in health, finance, and ICT and digital media sectors within the MPS. The qualitative survey focused on Maltese coaches experienced in delivering coaching within public service settings.

### **3.7.2 Sampling Frame**

Researchers use a sampling frame to identify members of a specific subgroup within the study population with specific characteristics associated with the phenomena being studied and can provide insight into the research questions (Asiamah et al., 2017). The sampling frame excludes all non-target population members (Hayes et al., 2019). The population in this study was diverse, making it an excellent choice to study coaching insights. Several criteria were devised for this purpose.

Before the survey was conducted, the researcher, with the gatekeeper of the People and Standards Division (Government HR), used an online survey service, SurveyMonkey, to screen potential SPO research respondents. The inclusion criteria for SPOs were that (i) respondents had provided coaching to their subordinates; (ii) had successfully received coaching from independent coaches; (iii) had collaborated with their direct superiors for more than one year; and (iv) had received coaching from their direct superiors. Junior management/first-line managers below salary scale 7 were excluded from the study because they were not involved in strategic management decisions. The inclusion criteria for ICIs were that they had to have a master's-level qualification and have coached people in the public service/sector. Individuals who did not meet the required criteria were automatically excluded from the study.

## **3.8 SAMPLING AND DESIGN**

This section is divided into two subsections: 3.8.1 discusses the probability and non-probability sampling, then 3.8.2 presents the sampling design of this study.

Sampling is the process of drawing statistical conclusions from a random sample of data. The process of selecting members of a population to participate in an

investigation and to contribute as sources of primary data is guided by the concept of sampling. This principle establishes the conditions to be met and guides the choice of those members of the population who will participate. The choice of sampling is a critical factor in the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the research results (Gabriel et al., 2019). Probability and non-probability sampling are techniques used in research, which this researcher will discuss in the following paragraphs.

### **3.8.1 Probability and Non-Probability Sampling**

A type of random sampling is used to select items for a probability sample. Probability sampling enables higher confidence in the representativeness of data by employing a selection process in which each member of the population has an equal and independent chance of being selected (Etikan & Babtope, 2019). There are four main random samplings: (i) simple random sampling, (ii) stratified random sampling, (iii) cluster sampling, and (iv) systematic sampling.

Simple random sampling yields samples highly representative of the population, but it cannot be used when the population units are heterogeneous (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). Stratified random sampling can produce strata or layers highly representative of the corresponding strata or layers present in the population, but this method can be laborious and time-consuming, especially for producing larger samples (Buntin, 2020). Cluster sampling, by comparison, is convenient and easy to use, but it may not be effective when members of the Unit are not homogeneous (i.e., if they differ from each other) (Alimohamadi & Sepandi, 2019). Systematic sampling generates a sample highly representative of the population without a random number generator, but this is less random than simple random sampling (Etikan & Babtope, 2019).

Non-probability sampling means that the parts of the sample are not chosen randomly; this is less likely to produce representative samples than probability sampling; however, researchers still use non-probability sampling. There are six types of non-probability sampling: (i) judgement sampling (homogeneous purposeful sampling), (ii) quota sampling, (iii) convenience sampling, (iv) voluntary response sampling, (v) snowball sampling, and (vi) sequential sampling (Etikan & Babtope, 2019).

In judgement sampling (homogenous purposive sampling), the researcher selects subjects solely based on their knowledge and credibility (Bhardwaj, 2019). In quota sampling, the researcher chooses based on shared characteristics or traits (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021). In a convenience sample, the researcher selects people from a population that is easy to reach (Victor et al., 2020). Respondents who voluntarily participate in a study, typically via an online survey, are included in a voluntary sample selection (Etikan & Babtobe, 2019). In snowball sampling, the people already in the sample group help the researcher find more recruits (Parker et al., 2019). Finally, in sequential sampling, the researcher selects a sample or group and then moves to another after collecting and analysing the data (Schreier, 2018).

The pros of non-probability sampling include the ability to provide descriptive comments about the sample. Compared to probability sampling, it is both time and cost-effective. It is also useful when performing probability or inconvenient sampling. The cons are that the sample group does not adequately represent the total population because an unknown percentage of the population is not included. Compared to probability sampling, it leads to the lower general validity of the research results. Estimating sample variability and identifying likely biases can also present challenges (Buelens et al., 2018).

In this study, a non-probability judgement sampling approach was chosen for collecting qualitative data, while a stratified probability sampling approach was chosen for collecting numerical data. The advantage of stratified sampling is that it can systematically obtain a sample that considers the population's demographic composition, thereby providing more accurate research results (Buntin, 2020). As the sample from each stratum can be chosen randomly, there is no bias, so the method seems fair for participants. As grouping participants must be careful and mutually exclusive, stratified random sampling eliminates variation and the possibility of overlap between strata.

The drawbacks of stratified random sampling include the possibility that researchers may already know the characteristics shared by the population, thereby increasing the possibility of bias in the stratification process. Researchers may have to plan extra time and effort for this process management (Buntin, 2020). The sample obtained by

randomly selecting individuals from each stratum might not accurately reflect the entire population. In this situation, it is essential to look at the results to determine if the sample is representative. Once the researcher receives the complete sample, analysing the data and information becomes more complex as s/he has to consider the different strata of the sample (Buntin, 2020).

The advantages of judgement sampling are that it is well understood and can be improved over many years of practice. The researcher is allowed to use his/her skills and judgement. No particular statistical expertise is required, and no time is wasted on numbers (Bhardwaj, 2019). The drawback of this sampling method is that it relies only on the researcher's judgement and allows the possibility of bias (Bhardwaj, 2019).

### **3.8.2 Sampling Design**

A sampling design is a mathematical function that gives the researcher the probability of any sample being drawn from the overall study population. It is established before the actual data collection is carried out.

The quantitative survey was drawn from a population of 500 SPOs working in three main sectors within the MPS. This consisted of interviews with mid-level managers who were selected randomly. Yamane's formula (1973) was used to determine the sample size. The statistical formula devised by Taro Yamane is  $n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$ , where:

- n is the required sample size from the population under study
- N is the whole population under study
- e is the precision or sampling error, usually 0.10, 0.05 or 0.01

Using Taro Yamane's statistical formula to determine the adequate sample size for 500 respondents in the study population, this would be:

- $n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$
- $N = 500; e = 0.1; e^2 = 0.05$
- $n = 500 / 1 + 500 (0.05)^2$
- $n = 222$

As indicated in [Table 12](#) below, the sample size is 222 respondents, i.e., 44.4% of the target population.

Table 12: Sampling Matrix

Sector	Population	% Sample	Sample
Health	367	44.4%	163
Finance	68	44.4%	30
ICT	65	44.4%	29
<b>Total</b>	500	44.4%	222

While quantitative methods focus on maintaining the representativeness of a population, qualitative methods are concerned with obtaining in-depth data from a few purposefully selected research participants, which is then analysed to understand better the phenomenon being studied (Lanz et al., 2019; Van Rijnsoever, 2017).

The table above shows that the quantitative research sample included SPOs in healthcare, finance, ICT, and digital media within MPS. For the qualitative research sample, this researcher first set the sample size at 30 interviews (Vasileiou et al., 2018). A study by Braun and Clarke (2021) found that saturation was reached after conducting 12 interviews of their qualitative thematic analysis. Hennink et al. (2017) described how researchers typically achieve code saturation between 9 and 16 interviews and meaning saturation in 16–24 interviews. In this study, the researcher stopped when he reached a saturation of 20 individuals. Those who had shown interest and were suitable for the study were selected and contacted.

### 3.8.3 The problem of Sample Selection

This researcher attempted to interview the Principal Permanent Secretary (PPS), Permanent Secretaries (PSs) and Director Generals (DGs) (top executives who are part of the Higher Executive Service (HES)) within the MPS, but permission was not granted. The main gatekeeper of the study informed the researcher that the approval was not granted for reasons of confidentiality and compliance, data integrity and

privacy. There was also a political reason for this – ‘the recent murder of a journalist’ – so seniors did not want to be asked questions that could put them at risk. The researcher also tried to interview senior SPOs, but the Central Government (CGM) could have asked why certain types of SPOs were chosen and others were not. This researcher did not insist because the findings of this project could have negatively affected the study subjects. The common data collection practice within the MPS is SurveyMonkey, and this researcher followed and adhered to that protocol.

### **3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This section describes some of the ethical aspects considered for the study, along with others outlined in this chapter. Research ethics can be defined as what is ethically and legally right in research and the norms of behaviour that define right and wrong (Huma & Nayeem, 2017). Protecting participants and following data-protection laws requires ethical considerations. The study was conducted in accordance with the Data-Protection Act of Malta Chapter 586 (MJCL, 2018a), the UK Data-Protection Act 2018 (gov.uk, 2018), and the European Union (EU) General Data-Protection Regulation (GDPR) (GDPR.eu, 2016) and subsequent legislation. The study was conducted in accordance with the GDPR principles and the research data *Code of Conduct on Data Treatment for Research Purposes* (2018), published by the University of Derby (UOD, 2018).

In research ethics, there are four main categories: informed and voluntary permission, the confidentiality of information, the anonymity of participants, and beneficence and nonmaleficence to participants. According to Israel and Hay (2006), as cited by Healey et al. (2013), various ethical guidelines have established diverse ethical criteria for research involving human subjects. Besides the University’s PGR rules, this researcher has followed the Belmont report (HHS.gov, 2018) on ethical research principles, which considers (i) respect for the individual, (ii) beneficence, and (iii) justice. This researcher protected the confidentiality, dignity and well-being of study subjects.

Before conducting the actual study, the University’s PGR rules were followed, and a research proposal was submitted to the Chair of the School of Business, Research Ethics Committee, UOD. Following the submission of the research proposal, ethical

approval was granted by the university. Later, a registration application was submitted to the university to obtain ethical clearance from the university's research committee. Following several supervision meetings, an application for the confirmation of doctoral registration was also submitted. Provisions were made for the first viva, and the outcome was approved by the University Research Committee. The ethical process for the participants was only part of the picture. Other ethical values and related descriptions considered for this study are detailed in Appendix L.

### **3.10 PROCEDURES**

A few weeks before the study, the lead researcher presented to the gatekeeper of the People and Standards Division (the Government's HR) a letter of approval from the Director of Studies, confirming that the researcher would conduct research as part of his Doctorate of Professional Practice (DProf) (Appendix M). This researcher briefed all other Government HR gatekeepers about the research purpose and the eligibility of the respondents; the communication strategy needed to facilitate communication between this researcher and the gatekeepers and between gatekeepers and SPOs.

SurveyMonkey's online questionnaire was launched on 01 March 2018 and ended on 30 April 2018, delivered by the gatekeepers of the Government's HR department via a link provided by this researcher in an e-mail to SPOs (Appendix N). The e-mail discussed the study, the research problem, the time needed to complete the questionnaire, ethical considerations, and the timeline. This researcher provided personal contact information if respondents wished to contact him with questions.

ICIs, on the other hand, were contacted through an initial phone call, followed by an introductory e-mail (Appendix O) sent to each target, explaining the nature and scope of the project, their role in the study, and ethical considerations (anonymity, confidentiality, record keeping, etc.) (Ngozwana, 2018). All interviewees immediately agreed to participate and were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix P). Informed consent is a critical concept in ethics; it ensures that prospective participants know the study's objectives, how the data will be utilised, and their participation. Human subject participation was voluntary. The interviews were conducted between 01 February and 31 March 2018.

### **3.10.1 Protection of Study Subjects**

The researcher used pseudonymous codes to protect the identities of the study subjects (Resnik, 2016). During interviews with coaches, the researcher distributed an informed consent form to all coach participants, as recommended by McGrath et al. (2019). The consent form for the interview included details about the research, its purpose, inclusion and exclusion criteria, rights of study participants, and other pertinent details. As Arifin (2018) suggested, the researcher followed a rigorous procedure to verify that all study participants had signed informed consent forms before data collection.

### **3.10.2 The Piloting Phase**

The researcher was concerned about his involvement in the studied phenomenon. His understanding was that his role as an insider researcher was to listen and try to gauge the study topics' relevance to social reality. This researcher did not want to be perceived as the power within the process, so he employed volunteer test subjects to validate the online questionnaire and the interview guide to determine whether these instruments fit the underlying theoretical and conceptual framework.

For the design and testing of the online questionnaire, this researcher recruited fifteen (15) SPOs who are experts in administrative research and work with the Institute for the Public Service (IPS) in the OPM. Five other individuals were identified to test the validity of the interview guide: three public officials with a wide range of management and research experience in the public service and two other trainers working outside the public service but with experience in delivering training for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Their role during the process was that of research participants. The debriefing following the pilot interview provided valuable insights into effective interview techniques and the interview process. The interview guide changes concerned the questions' structure and flow. The researcher also enlisted the help of an outside academic advisor and former public official, whose experience in public service gave the researcher an external perspective, so his valuable contribution guided the research.

As part of the pilot study, test subjects were asked to rate the research instruments individually and mark the relevance/non-relevance of each question to the study aims

and objectives; this allowed the researcher to determine what changes needed to be made. The pilot study results were then compared to the literature to ensure validity (Bengtsson, 2016; Mohajan, 2017). All testing volunteers were asked to answer the following questions:

- Was the purpose of the study explained clearly?
- Did you find the directions for completing the questionnaire clear and simple to understand?
- Did you find the questions, response choices or statements ambiguous or difficult to understand?
- Did you find the questions or remarks inappropriate?
- How long did it take you to finish the SurveyMonkey questionnaire?

Specific changes were made to the online survey based on feedback from test subjects. There were no concerns about the questions and the questionnaire's suitability. Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the instruments used in this research for each of the different constructs (Taber, 2018). Table 14 below summarises the Cronbach Alpha statistics, both before and after removing interfering items, and shows how the initial alphas for 'favouritism', 'coaching definitions', and 'management effectiveness' were below 0.6, indicating an internal error level. Step-by-step item removal and Cronbach's Alpha iteration were performed until no more increases in Cronbach Alpha's could be obtained from additional item deletion (with resulting alphas exceeding 0.6), indicating that the remaining items in the instrument were free of internal ambiguities.

Table 13. Summary of Initial Cronbach Alpha Statistics for SPOs Instrument

Construct	Initial Cronbach's Alpha	Initial Number of Items	Number of Items Removed	Final Number of Items	Final Cronbach's Alpha
Skills, Training and Development	0.673	10	2	8	0.708
Competencies	0.723	2	None	2	0.723
Favouritism	0.494	7	3	4	0.664
Coaching Definitions	0.581	3	None	3	0.581
Coaching Practices	0.632	18	4	14	0.632
Management Effectiveness	0.561	4	1	3	0.641

Since the responses to Question 13, which asked SPOs to indicate the coaching received, were confusing, the question was rewritten. Open-ended questions such as 'What are your views on Executive Coaching Practice in Malta?' (Question 25) were introduced at the request of the testing volunteers to allow respondents to discuss the several types of coaching and other approaches to professional development. Before the survey was introduced, tests showed that the online questionnaire could be completed in 15 to 20 minutes, which was considered a reasonable amount of time for respondents to complete and not give up.

### 3.10.3 Data Collection

A vital component of the research is data collection and analysis. Data collection was a major experience for this researcher, as it served as a powerful reminder that, no matter how carefully prepared in advance, data collection will take its own course and pace. Researchers in scientific studies use surveys to capture people's views and

beliefs about their existing and external world (Bellamy et al., 2016; Percy et al., 2015). Data were cross-tabulated to identify the relationship variables based on age, gender, sector, salary scale, qualifications, experience, and comparison of views.

The researcher used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies in this research project. The data collection instruments differ from one another, but each data collection instrument and the data it yielded provided a particular perspective on the research questions. The combination of methods yielded a composite picture of the phenomenon under investigation.

The two main methods for data collection were online questionnaires and interviews. For this study (Phase 1), quantitative data with qualitative items was collected using a SurveyMonkey questionnaire for 222 SPOs. Qualitative data collection (Phase 2) with 20 coaches began when the researcher used LinkedIn as an online social media platform to recruit study participants. Because the researcher used his professional and personal network on LinkedIn, the study did not need to obtain permission or approval from LinkedIn to access research participants, as per the User Agreement. The data was collected over one year, which, in the researcher's opinion, allowed enough time for significant patterns, themes and trends to emerge in the data.

#### **3.10.4 Data Management, Security and Destruction**

Data storage, protection, and the destruction of raw data containing information on study subjects were considered in the researcher's approach to data management. This researcher followed the recommendations of Corti et al. (2019) in terms of data protection and sanitisation. The researcher kept the subjects' data securely in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office, including paper copies and USB drives. Only the researcher had access to the study data.

To protect the privacy of study participants, the researcher will delete all information and documents related to this research after five years. Corti et al. (2019) suggest efficient data sanitisation methods include disintegration, incineration, pulverisation, shredding and smelting. The researcher will shred all materials and printouts containing information about the study volunteers. In addition, the researcher will (a)

wipe participant data from all USB drives electronically and (b) destroy all USB drives.

### **3.10.5 Data Analysis**

The researcher followed the theoretical thematic analysis as suggested by Percy et al. (2015). We learn, for example, that Catacutan and de Guzman (2015) used a subset of thematic analysis to uncover issues and provided a theoretical framework to make ethical decisions. One benefit of thematic analysis is that it helps the researcher to discover, explain and relate the implicit and explicit ideas and insights of study subjects (Ta et al., 2020).

To construct codes, patterns, categories, themes and subthemes within the dataset, the researcher utilised the content of the data obtained from study subjects as a starting point (Terry et al., 2017). A codebook was used to track the data. As Nowell et al. (2017) described, a codebook or template matrix is a valuable tool as it helps the researcher keep track of the given theoretical concepts to achieve code and meaning saturation. The template served as a theoretical lens and an audit trail to analyse the dataset (Ngong et al., 2020), allowing the researcher to follow a strategy that included thirteen steps from research design to data collection methods and procedures.

The first step was to become familiar with the text dataset (Percy et al., 2015). The researcher analysed each questionnaire and transcript independently, examining the text data line by line and underlining paragraphs, words, sentences, and facts to understand the material. As the researcher worked through the data, he remained open to the possibility of discovering new patterns. The second step was determining which information should be used for further analysis.

In the third step, all data that did not directly address the research questions were omitted. The researcher created a separate file at this stage and saved all irrelevant data. The researcher coded and categorised the data based on the study subjects' responses to the survey and the most important interview questions. Descriptive labels were added as codes and categories developed by the researcher to help him better understand what did not fit into the code or category. In step four, the researcher

reached code saturation for all evolving codes. According to Hennink et al. (2017), code saturation occurs when no more data is collected from research participants, as code saturation identifies and understands all aspects of the subject being studied.

The fifth step was to look for patterns in the data collection. The researcher began by grouping emergent codes or categories to establish patterns by noting connections, similarities and differences and referring to the matrix of emergent codes. The sixth step was to seek interconnected patterns associated with new themes. To bring the patterns to life and clarify them, the researcher organised and grouped the patterns based on the emerging themes and direct citations from the dataset.

In the seventh step, irrelevant patterns or theoretical conceptions of emerging issues were excluded from the investigation. The researcher also created a separate file of unrelated patterns to answer the study questions. The eighth step was to look for new themes. The researcher double-checked that the grouped and emerging themes and subthemes concisely represented the identified emerging themes and theoretical concepts.

Step nine ensured that the emerging themes and subthemes matched the supporting patterns. The researcher extensively explored the connections between themes and subthemes to uncover and discover different and subjective perspectives on skills gaps and the purpose of coaching in Maltese settings. The researcher reached meaning saturation for these emerging themes. Saturation materialised when the researcher reached a point where he could no longer derive new insights from the data. According to Hennink et al. (2017), a researcher reaches saturation when s/he understands (i.e., almost everything).

The tenth step was the integration of the themes and subthemes that had emerged in the previous steps. The researcher remained receptive to discovering new codes, patterns, and categories to uncover new themes and subthemes during the process. Step eleven was to define and describe the breadth of each developing theme. Step twelve was characterising each emerging thematic pattern with supporting citations to shed light on the meaning of the patterns within the dataset. Finally, step thirteen involved

the researcher in bringing the themes and subthemes together to synthesise the topic under study.

The researcher used NVivo 12 software to support Phase I and Phase II of the study by iteratively analysing the results, organising the codes into themes, and identifying any new patterns (Houghton et al., 2016). NVivo is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software package that was downloaded and installed on the researcher's laptop; it analyses the material using a language package. This software does not interpret the results, so the researcher is the primary tool for interpretation. The researcher used these themes as a structure for extrapolating the results. Appendix Q shows screenshots from NVivo used in this study to illustrate how the analysis was developed. This software helped the researcher to save time through efficient data management.

### **3.11 ACHIEVING TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The researcher tried to achieve trustworthiness in this study by following the interpretative strategies suggested by Caracelli and Greene (1997) and Klein and Myers (1999) to ensure credibility (subsection 3.11.1), dependability [reliability] and validity (3.11.2), transferability (3.11.3) and confirmability (3.11.4).

#### **3.11.1 Strategy for Ensuring Credibility**

Some authors (Christensen & Miguel, 2018; Heale & Forbes, 2013) have pointed out the importance of providing a clear account to ensure the 'credibility of the evidence collected'. Reproducibility is another term that refers to the credibility of the research process, which can be replicated to ensure that the quantitative and qualitative methods used appropriately generated the research results, analysis and conclusions; *de facto*, whether consistent results are obtained when a similar study is conducted. When different researchers reach consistent conclusions using the same methods, such studies are considered credible and robust (Allison et al., 2018). To achieve this, the testing volunteers and the researcher shared their perspectives on aspects of the project under study.

The researcher's challenges in this process were discussed, and participants expressed strong opinions on the research results that emerged from the study. The researcher presented information and informed participants of claims backed by credible evidence. The evidence assured the credibility of the interpretive research in this study of data triangulation between subjects and meticulous data management and analysis processes (*verbatim* transcription of interviews, accurate records of contacts, surveys and interviews). Throughout this interpretative investigation, the results were independently confirmed by all parties involved. To ensure the credibility of this study, several steps were taken:

- Face-to-face interviews were recorded and noted in writing.
- Interpreting the findings was justified by outlining or demonstrating the steps by which the researcher's interpretations were arrived at.
- Theories that might contradict the findings were highlighted to provide alternative explanations or a better understanding of the phenomena.
- Shared debriefing and support: This researcher nominated SPOs working with the Institute for the Public Service (IPS), who are experts in administrative research. He also appointed trainers who work outside the public service/sector and have experience in delivering training to SMEs.
- The researcher also enlisted the help of an external academic advisor and a former public official as a point of reference to discuss the research process and findings, with the scope to minimise own bias and to help in 'stuck' situations.
- Member checking: Transcripts of individual interviews were emailed to participants individually for review. Participants could add to their interview transcript and discuss any parts of the interview they did not wish to be used for interpretation in this research.
- The researcher listened to the recordings multiple times and read the transcripts to ensure greater reliability.
- Audit trail: A complete record of activities was kept throughout the study. This included correspondence, interview transcripts, coding, and data analysis.

### **3.11.2 Strategy for Ensuring Dependability [Reliability] and Validity**

Reliability refers to data collection being consistent, dependable and repeatable. In this context, dependability refers to a measurement of consistency through time and among samples comparable to one another. Over time, a trustworthy research instrument will generate similar data from similar respondents. On the other hand, the validity covers a fairly wide swath of ground, and in positivism, it is preserved by the careful use of many approaches. The validity of quantitative data may be enhanced through careful sampling, suitable instrumentation, and appropriate statistical analyses (Sadik, 2019).

Reliability was defined by Colorafi and Evans (2016) as the consistency or dependability with which an instrument assesses the characteristic that it is intended to measure. According to Clayson et al. (2019), reliability is based on the replicability or stability of research findings. It relies on the consistency and reliability of data collection (e.g., subject narratives), interpretation, and analysis. Triangulation in this study entailed using a variety of methods, both quantitative and qualitative, to collect data. Triangulation of research results increased validity by collecting SurveyMonkey questionnaires from SPOs and semi-structured interviews from ICIs. The researcher believes that if an independent researcher repeated this study using the same data collection tools in other occupational sectors, the results would be equally trustworthy.

Representative constructs build on the knowledge of actual events and are, therefore, more accurate. For a better understanding of reality, the information is reconstructed or presented differently than originally (Nayak & Singh, 2021). For example, narratives created by ICIs during interviews described similar responses to the online surveys, but SPOs added thick and rich descriptions related to the issues of corruption, nepotism and favouritism. The purpose of this exercise with ICIs was twofold. First, participants indicated whether they felt the data was interpreted correctly. Second, participants could show whether they agreed with the conclusions or felt that assumptions had been made.

Validity is measured by both theoretical and empirical evidence (Hayashi et al., 2019). Measurement validity refers to whether a measure of concept measures what it purports, which can only happen if the evidence supports this claim. In interpretive research, it is the extent to which the phenomena being studied are reflected in the

perceptions of the study population. Measures to ensure the validity of the studies include the method and choice of sampling method (Mohajan, 2017). In this research context, randomly assigning subjects to distinct groups was possible. The researcher's primary goal in this study was to ensure that data collection, analysis and interpretation were performed in a way that was internally valid, externally valid and reliable.

External validity or generalisability means how well the research results can be used and extrapolated to individuals with similar characteristics to study subjects (Stuart et al., 2018). The study cannot be generalised because of certain limitations, such as Malta's specific culture, being a small country where everyone knows one another. The researcher was aware of the potential pitfalls of insider research, including his role, involvement, and proximity to the validity problem (Berkovic et al., 2020). These potential validity issues were explored in the literature, so this researcher felt that his insider position let him understand the nature of the respondents and their experiences.

The findings in this study can be applied to a wide variety of real-world situations and previous research. Readers will be able, through these connections, not only to expand their knowledge but also to relate more personally to other experiences. In order to make sure that their findings were as objective and accurate as possible, the researchers conducted a content analysis on secondary sources such as online articles or coaches' official documents, which were cross-examined for triangulation. The selected topics were appropriately confirmed by an external academic advisor and a former experienced government official.

### **3.11.3 Strategy for Ensuring Transferability**

Transferability can be a valuable indicator for assessing the generalisability of findings. The need for transferability suggests that researchers should reveal extensive information about the context and methods of their study, so the people involved can assess its applicability or feasibility (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2020). The plausibility of the codes and themes that emerged from the analysis showed transferability in this study. Grouping the data around critical themes or topics helped capture the knowledge gained through surveys and interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Literature has been used to support the research findings, challenge the status quo, and add new

knowledge. The reader can independently assess whether and to what extent the published results can be transferred to other contexts once the researcher has defined the study environment and provided the structures, assumptions and processes resulting from the data.

#### **3.11.4 Strategy for Ensuring Confirmability**

Bias can occur at any research stage, including in the study design or data collection and during data analysis and reporting. The researcher avoided personal and professional bias throughout the study process, as indicated by Singh and Estefan (2018) and Harris and Sen (2019). Rubin and Babbie (2016) believe that the researcher must instil confidence in the research's design and rigour. The more data available, the lower the risk of bias in interpretation. The researcher addressed bias through internal means by clarifying beliefs, obligations and interests and discussing ethical concerns through self-awareness, self-regulation or self-monitoring. The researcher's difficulties were discussed with informants, who expressed strong opinions on the research findings that emerged from the study.

### **3.12 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

The researcher controlled the entire research process (Orange, 2016), the subjective dimension of the research (Cruz, 2015), and the research outcomes (El Hussein et al., 2017). The study's lead investigator kept a neutral stance throughout the process, even before commencing the literature review. The researcher guided the study process by finding gaps in the literature review (Orange, 2016) on aspects of coaching in the Maltese setting, identifying research problems (Gelling, 2015) and formulating the research questions (Cruz, 2015). As recommended by El Hussein et al. (2017), the author tried to set aside existing knowledge and experience on the subject under study.

The researcher assessed latent subjectivity to verify that the survey and interviews were straightforward and clear. To capture the social context of study subjects, the researcher portrayed ethical research behaviours such as compassion, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, and intellectual honesty (Furr et al., 2022). The researcher remained

objective throughout the research period and did not try to persuade study subjects to take positions other than those they held.

El Hussein et al. (2017) stated that reflexivity is the researcher's awareness of controlling one's desires, fitting the collected data into concepts, and monitoring one's prejudices and biases regarding the research topic. Reflexivity urges us to explore how a researcher's involvement in a particular study, influences, affects and informs that research. According to Neubauer et al. (2019) and Pandey and Pandey (2021), researchers' personal and professional experiences should not influence findings. This researcher used a reflexive journal to record all aspects of his research and to reflect on generating ideas and analysis. According to Whitaker and Atkinson (2019), reflexivity is the researcher's state of mind in critically reflecting on their thoughts and actions regarding their position in a research project.

As for the evaluation and interpretation of the questionnaires, the data collected from the SPOs were quantifiable and could be interpreted objectively using statistical evaluation. However, interviews required a qualitative approach involving the researcher's ability to interpret and judge. The researcher remained introspective throughout the survey and interview process and during the process of co-creating meaning with study subjects (Čaušević, 2021).

This research approach overall was thought-provoking, and the researcher's own reflections surfaced when challenged by academic supervisors, work colleagues and friends interested in this study. This researcher has only shared some of his findings with Emerald Publishing (Appendix R).

### **3.13 INSTRUMENTATION**

This section deals with the instruments used in the study, which were a questionnaire (subsection 3.13.1), interviews (3.13.2) and documents (3.13.3). The theoretical underpinning and rationale for these tools are discussed in these subsections. Earlier studies have shown that interviews and questionnaires are associated with an interpretative research approach (Myers & Klein, 2011).

In this study, a two-phase strategy was chosen to examine the SPOs' and ICIs' perceptions of the skills gap in the MPS that could be remedied by coaching (objective 1), the different types of coaching that already exist within the MPS (objective 2), the development of coaching practices in Malta (objective 3), and the competencies needed for public leaders (objective 4). The first phase included scanning a sizeable territorial area using an online SurveyMonkey questionnaire designed explicitly for SPOs (hence, quantitative). In the second phase, a small territory was scanned using an interview guide via Skype and face-to-face interview sessions with ICIs following the interview guide (hence, qualitative). The initial investigation results, which identified the most promising dig sites, contributed to the success of these excavations. The effectiveness of the studies depended on integrating the two methods. The researcher encountered no difficulties using these methods.

### **3.13.1 Questionnaires (Phase 1)**

Questionnaire instruments are popular with researchers in business, management, leadership, coaching, and other social science fields. The availability of online survey tools that could be distributed through e-mail and social media seemed to provide means of communication with study subjects, with the benefits outweighing the disadvantages. Questionnaires are low-cost and straightforward to administer, allowing the rapid gathering of large amounts of data and are convenient and objective (Borgobello et al., 2019; Fairclough & Thelwall, 2022). However, questionnaires also have disadvantages: respondents may choose random answers if they fail to carefully read the question (Dalati & Gómez, 2018). One can also consider the challenges of formulating questions, as each respondent may interpret them differently.

To mitigate these challenges, this researcher consulted a pool of testing volunteers to review the instruments used, to indicate weaknesses in design and content. For the quantitative data, using the SurveyMonkey online questionnaire for SPOs was appropriate to answer all the required questions; an asterisk feature was added to SurveyMonkey to let respondents answer each question and avoid picking random answers.

The designed questionnaire (Appendix S), on the SurveyMonkey web-based application, consisted of 34 questions and was distributed to the respondents through a link in the distributed e-mail. By the time the questionnaire was closed, at the end of April 2018, 222 respondents had completed and returned the questionnaire. The data collected from the SurveyMonkey questionnaire was converted into numbers and then into graphs. Most questions for the online questionnaire and interview guide were mainly drawn from talent development (TD) and coaching studies informed by Baron and Morin (2010), de Haan et al. (2011), Ingham (2006), Kirkland (2009), Perrin (2003), and Sears (2003). Other questions were suggested by earlier administrative research studies carried out by local researchers on public leadership studies.

### **3.13.2 Interviews (Phase 2)**

There are three main types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured; each type has its own features. The elements of structured and unstructured interviews can be found in semi-structured interviews. Collecting data from participants involves letting them tell their stories. These stories are called ‘field texts’ because they provide raw data for self-knowledge. Interviews offer the advantage that researchers can gather detailed information about their study topics; also, the researcher has complete control over the process during primary data collection and can eliminate ambiguity. Disadvantages include the challenges of date, location, and time (Roulston & Choi, 2018). The interesting aspect of interviews is that respondents are free and willing to express themselves.

Gray (2014:382) states that interviews are a suitable research technique ‘... involving the examination of feelings or attitudes’. For Gray, ‘[a]t the root of interviewing, then, is the intent to understand the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make from that experience’ (p.383), which was the aim of this research. He also acknowledges that interviews with a survey approach can discuss concerns arising from the survey data.

The researcher made sure the interviews were conducted in a relaxed environment. According to McGrath et al. (2019), the environment and situation for conducting the

research have a significant impact on how researchers organise the interviews, which respondents they choose, what interview material they use, the structure of the discussion, and how researchers interpret the findings. No such problems arose with the interview guide (Appendix T) (which had been tested by volunteers) because the interview guide was not a self-completion questionnaire, and the questions to be asked were addressed directly to the coaches through one-on-one interviews.

The semi-structured interviews conducted via Skype and in person at the coach's workplace were concluded by March 2018. Modern technologies today offer advanced communication software such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. These platforms had recently become popular and would have been included if they had been available during the study. Skype is better for teams looking for a holistic business solution, while Zoom and Teams are more suited to frequent video chats and meetings. Unlike meeting subjects in person, these advanced software programmes could help researchers ease communication.

All study participants were provided with a brief explanation of the purpose of the interview, and permission was obtained to use the data given to the researcher. All participants were informed about confidentiality issues. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study without giving a reason. Everyone involved knew this and was informed verbally and in writing. None refused to participate or left the study.

As Malta is bilingual, the interviews with the coaches were conducted in Maltese and English; however, the written language was English. Some Maltese expressions have been kept in the original language and then translated idiomatically. To make each interviewee feel comfortable, the interviews took the form of a guided conversation rather than *staccato* questions and answers. Each interview lasted about an hour and a half (1:30). The researcher ensured that the subjects understood the questions asked. At no time did the researcher ask leading questions or attempt to shape responses in the desired direction.

This researcher assumed that the participants answered honestly and truthfully based on their experiences. The researcher was also careful not to overemphasise the

respondents' answers. After the project's data collection phase, a debriefing took place with all interviewees, where the conclusions were presented. All participants were thanked for their time and effort.

These interviews aimed to uncover issues related to the MPS. In these interviews, participants were asked to talk about their professional practices. With the consent of the interviewees, all sessions were digitally recorded. Recording interviews has many advantages, such as saving time, not taking notes, focusing more on the conversations, and keeping a permanent record (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). This researcher would have only taken notes if interviewees refused or stated that they were uncomfortable with recordings.

The data collected from the interview sessions were transcribed; then, all the transcripts were analysed, and many themes emerged that helped make sense of the data collected. The researcher edited all transcripts by repeatedly listening to all recorded interviews to ensure the research participants' ideas and insights were accurately reflected in the transcripts. The interview transcripts were stored in Microsoft OneNote with new passwords for each file and then transferred to NVivo 12 software for analysis.

### **3.13.3 Documents**

In this study, documents were analysed to clarify the context of the substantive content that illuminated deeper meanings. The coaching approaches used by the ICIs during their projects were confirmed in the records and verified by the progress, interim and final reports submitted to the researcher. The interviewees answered the researcher's questions about documentary evidence. The author also reviewed MPS documentation relating to professional development, the main training programme itself, and other strategic, policy or procedural documents relating to SPOs' development. We now conclude this chapter by discussing the risks and limitations of this study.

## **3.14 RISKS AND LIMITATIONS**

### **3.14.1 Risks**

In this research, risk can be viewed from two perspectives: (i) risks to study subjects and (ii) risks associated with conducting this study. The current project was carried out in a professional, work-related environment. The research participants (SPOs and ICIs) were accommodated in an office setting. The physical conditions were comfortable, and the research participants were unlikely to face any physical risks. In this research study, the subjects were neither paid nor volunteer subjects. There was no danger of subjects wanting to participate for monetary reasons or distorting the data to attract attention. Other factors considered were:

- The ability to obtain the resources and time necessary to conduct doctoral-level research.
- The researcher's ability to work at this level.
- The ability to guarantee that study subjects were prepared for the data collection phases.

As for the risk that the data would not provide meaningful results, there was one concern. Since coaching is a new phenomenon within MPS, the issues and concepts discussed in the study may have been misunderstood or misinterpreted by study subjects, thus leading to inaccurate responses. Another potential risk is that study subjects may have viewed Malta as unsuitable for mainstream Western organisations or a globalised world where foreigners are unaccustomed to Maltese cultural realities. Malta has changed over time from a village mentality to modern society. This is due to the influx of migrants from the EU and other country nationals (European, African, or Asian origin) and the technological advancements that have put Malta at the forefront of these developments.

To mitigate the risks in this study, the researcher conducted a risk assessment to ensure the protection of participants. It was not intended to compromise the research by causing participants to question laws, such as privacy, equal opportunity, discrimination (e.g., gender, race, religion, etc.) and employment rights. Study subjects were treated with fairness and respect, and they were not coerced into participating in

the study. The study subjects' dignity, well-being and safety were not compromised. The privacy of materials and individuals was maintained throughout data collection.

### **3.14.2 Limitations**

To date, no study has explicitly addressed coaching in the public service of Malta, so our understanding of coaching in Malta is limited to very few academic sources.

The representation of gender balance in the study does not reflect the actual gender balance of the MPS. This might have skewed the study data. Another limitation was the availability of study respondents selected through a sampling process. Only a few respondents could participate, which limited the sample size. The lack of access to senior managers of the MPS provided another significant limitation of the research. This might have constrained the analysis and may prompt calls for further research amongst public leaders.

Study subjects may have provided answers that represent their ideal selves, or they might have described techniques and processes found in textbooks, which may not reflect their actual practice. This study identified much confusion about the conceptual understanding of coaching. Thus, there is a possibility that the questions/definitions were unclear and confusing for the respondents. Furthermore, the strategies, styles and coaching contexts gathered in this study represent only a selection of the forms coaching can take in the MPS.

## **3.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has explained how this study was conducted and the methods used to collect and analyse data to answer the research questions. This study followed the principles of Klein and Myers (1999) and employed a mixed-methods approach, as described by Caracelli and Greene (1997). Quantitative data with qualitative items were collected from SPOs via a SurveyMonkey questionnaire, while qualitative data from ICIs were collected through semi-structured interviews. Both the questionnaire and the interview guide were piloted. In this study, the researcher used both found and generated documents. Integral to the discussion were the risks and limitations of the

study, aspects related to the reliability and validity of this study and ethical considerations. The following two chapters present the findings (Chapter 4) and discuss their interpretation (Chapter 5). The conclusions of the study are subsequently drawn in the concluding Chapter 6.

# Chapter 4: Findings

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*Change the way you look at things  
and the things you look at change.*

—Wayne W. Dyer

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into seven sections. Section 4.1 is the introduction to the chapter, followed by a presentation of information on participants' demographics (4.2). Section 4.3 briefly discusses the findings of the research questions. The findings in this chapter emerged from the data collection, classified according to the six themes which will directly address research question 1 (4.4), research question 2 (0) and research question 3 (4.6). Each theme is further divided into subthemes. The findings are presented logically and systematically, building on the literature review and the earlier theoretical and conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter concludes with a chapter summary in section 4.7.

## 4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The study subjects' demographic information (age, gender, education, coaching background and years of experience) was collected from Senior Public Officers (SPOs) and Independent Coach Instructors (ICIs) to understand their profile characteristics.

### 4.2.1 SPO Respondents (Middle Managers)

The margin of error is 4.91%, which means that the results are accurate to +/- 4.91%. The confidence level is 95%, which means that researchers can be confident that the data represents the entire population (Van Rijnsoever, 2017; Lanz et al., 2019). At a 95% confidence level, the margin of error of 4.91% means we can be 95% certain that the true population proportion falls within 4.91% of the measured proportion from the sample (either above or below). This margin of error may be considered satisfactory

depending on the specific context and criteria for success. For example, if the population proportion is close to 50%, a margin of error of 4.91% may be satisfactory. However, a smaller margin of error may be desired if the population proportion is closer to 0% or 100%. The survey respondents in this study were within 4.91% of the overall population's opinions, meaning that their responses were considered satisfactory.

Of the 222 respondents, 125 (56%) were male, and 97 (44%) were female. This gender balance does not reflect the actuality: within the Maltese Public Service (MPS), the percentage of women in senior positions is 21%, while that of men is 79%. The proportion of women among SPOs is 41%, while the proportion of men is 59% (servizz.gov.mt, 2019). No respondents who participated in the survey identified themselves as 'other.' The survey data were cross-tabulated to provide a deeper analysis. The gender distribution of respondents to the online SurveyMonkey questionnaire is shown in the pie chart below (Figure 7).

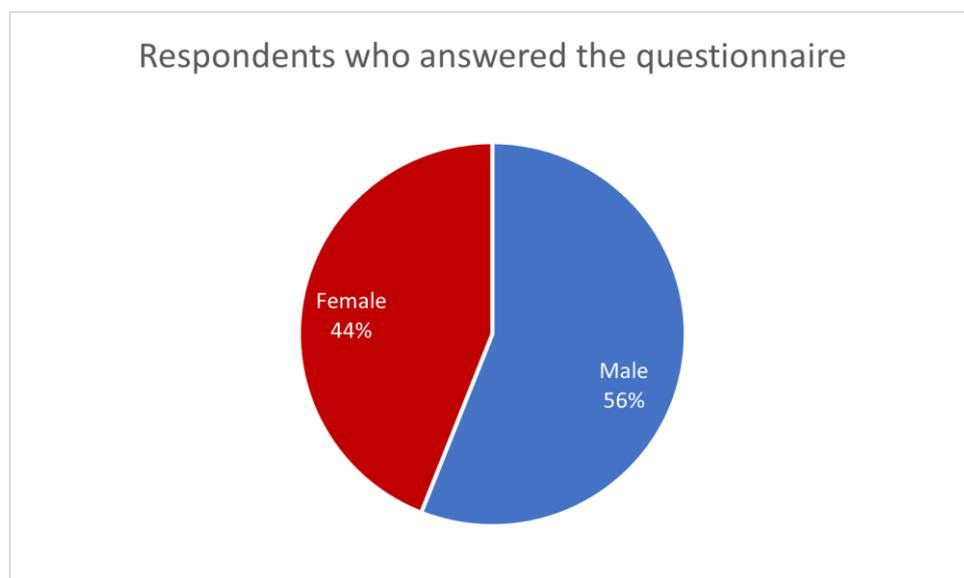


Figure 7: Completed Online Questionnaires by Gender of Survey Respondents

Most respondents (SPOs) who answered the online questionnaire belonged to the healthcare sector (n=145, 65%), followed by ICT (n=55, 25%) and the finance sector (n=22, 10%). The health sector is the largest in Malta and has a significant human resources capacity, with around 12,000 employees; there are 700 employees in the

finance sector and around 1,000 in ICT (Malta Public Service, 2020). There is no national data on age profiles. Table 14 shows that the category with the most participants was the age group 41 to 50 (34%), followed by 51 to 60 (32%). The table shows that those over 61 (1%) were the smallest group. The researcher did not ask about the classification/salary scale in these sectors, as the Central Government provides publicly available information on the intranet.

Table 14: Percentage of Survey Respondents by Age Group

Age Group	Responses	
	(percentage) (number)	
18 – 25	2%	4
26 – 30	3%	7
31 – 40	29%	64
41 – 50	34%	76
51 – 60	31%	70
61+	1%	1
	Respondents	222

The survey data (Figure 8) indicates that 46% of SPOs have a university degree and 5 to 15 years of managerial experience. The other 54% of SPOs have only post-secondary education. This point highlights that having a post-secondary education is often necessary to attain a leadership position. However, it also suggests that more experience, beyond just education, is essential in achieving success in these roles. This could mean gaining practical experience through internships or on-the-job training and developing specific skills and knowledge related to the industry or job role. Post-secondary education in Malta refers to those whose highest educational qualification is a certificate or diploma below bachelor’s level.

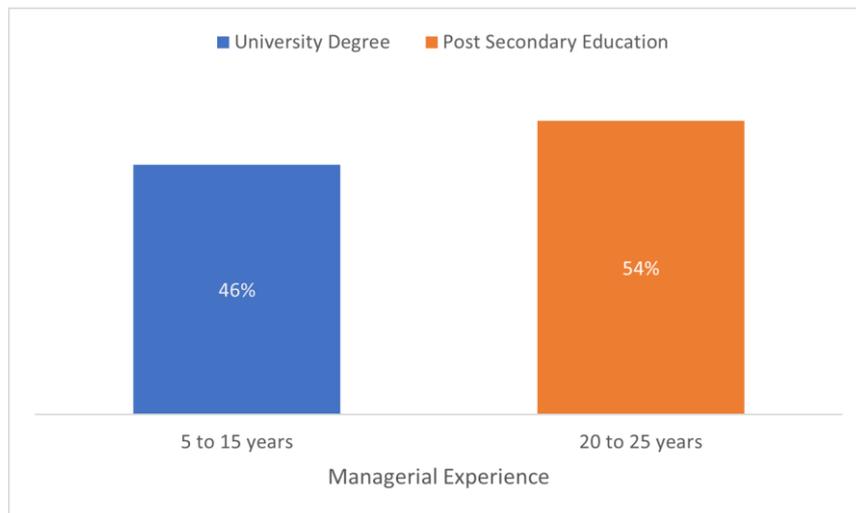


Figure 8: Qualifications of SPOs by Managerial Experience

#### 4.2.2 Interview Participants (Maltese Coaches: ICIs)

All ICI participants who agreed to participate in this study were selected from LinkedIn. Their previous professional work experience included healthcare, sales, insurance, stockbroking, management, ICT, training and consultancy. This mix of disciplines confirms Colpaert et al. (2018) and Preston's (2020) view that professional coaching is emerging as an interdisciplinary practice. The profile characteristics of these coaches (Table 15) are illustrated as follows:

Table 15: Interview Participants and their Profile Characteristics

Participants	Age	Gender	Experience (years)	Sector
ICI 1	30	Female	6	Health
ICI 2	28	Female	6	Finance
ICI 3	56	Male	17	ICT
ICI 4	29	Male	8	Health
ICI 5	35	Male	10	Finance
ICI 6	37	Female	10	ICT
ICI 7	52	Male	13	Health
ICI 8	48	Male	14	Finance
ICI 9	32	Male	12	ICT
ICI 10	36	Female	15	ICT
ICI 11	38	Male	10	Health
ICI 12	42	Female	16	Finance
ICI 13	34	Male	9	ICT
ICI 14	35	Male	10	Health
ICI 15	55	Male	7	Finance
ICI 16	47	Male	15	ICT

ICI 17	38	Female	6	Health
ICI 18	39	Female	7	Finance
ICI 19	40	Male	13	ICT
ICI 20	44	Female	11	Health

As shown in the table above, there were 8 female and 12 male participants. The age group with the most participants was 32–39-year-olds, followed by 40–48. The oldest participant was 56 years old, while the youngest was 28. The age profile of Independent Coach Instructors (ICIs) does not match that of SPOs, as the former has a lower average age. These are the type of coaches that SPOs deal with. This study suggests there are more experienced SPOs within the MPS, but they have little exposure to coaching. Younger ICIs, on the other hand, offer coaching services to private and public sectors but have little exposure to senior management. This means older SPOs do not hire younger coaches outside the MPS.

### 4.3 FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To interpret the results, this researcher used thematic analysis that was directly related to the research questions, as proposed by Percy et al. (2015). This was done in the following stages: becoming familiar with the data, generating first codes, exploring, reviewing, classifying, and naming themes. As described in the previous chapter, themes were transcribed using a coding process to reach higher levels of abstraction through multiple iterations of analysis.

The themes that emerged from the combined findings and to answer the research questions were a composite of several collective pattern codes derived from the data, as Terry et al. (2017) suggested. The six key themes that emerged from the combined findings and to answer the research questions are (1) Skills Shortages and Retention Challenges; (2) Key Aspects of Coaching – purposes, processes and outcome; (3) Coaching for Systematic Talent Development; (4) Organisational Culture of the MPS; (5) Organisational and Management Failings; and (6) Exploration of the Purposes of Coaching in the Maltese Setting. The analysis uses these themes to develop answers for each research question.

#### 4.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

##### ‘Can coaching contribute to closing the management and leadership skills gap in the Maltese Public Service?’

One of the main objectives of this study was to clarify the skills gap in the MPS and identify which subsets of these might be addressed by coaching. The findings show that management issues and development opportunities are the leading cause of the Maltese skills gap problem, along with employee retention, corruption, nepotism and favouritism. The fundamental issues addressed in this section are (i) skills shortages and (ii) retention challenges.

#### 4.4.1 Skills Shortages and Retention Challenges (Theme 1)

##### *Skills Shortages*

As shown in [Figure 9](#) below, 79% of SPOs in healthcare, finance, ICT and digital media have experienced skills shortages in recent years. Our results reconfirm Malta’s 2017 and 2018 European Commission (EC) reports and link skills shortages with retention problems. Most of those who responded to the SurveyMonkey questionnaire felt these sectors lacked communication, behavioural and training skills.

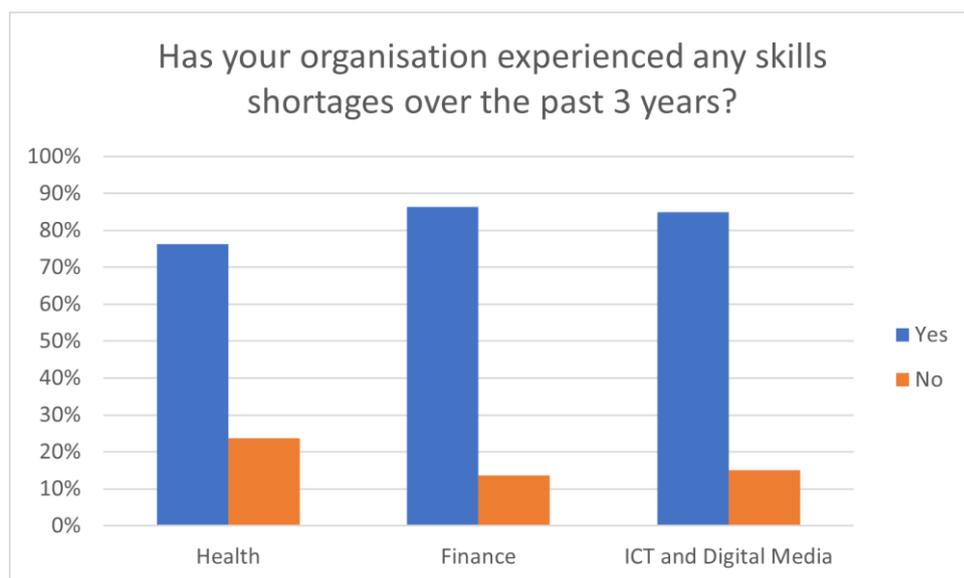


Figure 9: Skills Shortages over the Past Years

As described in the academic and grey literature, skills shortages in Malta have increased over the years, with employers unable to fill their vacancies in finance, law and management (Finance Malta, 2018; Malta Enterprise, 2017). Relatively few respondents (21%) in this survey indicated that technological advances, outdated information, lack of adequate human and financial resources, and general working conditions were responsible for recent skills shortages, but 70% (14 out of 20) of Maltese coaches believe that the lack of qualified staff in these sectors is *'due to the difficulties arising from the external market conditions'* and the *'mismatch between the skills required by organisations and individuals'*. These results form the core of our understanding of the problems faced by MPS. Findings suggest that the skills gap is not only related to issues of nepotism and corruption (as we will explore in theme 4, subtheme 3) but also more predictable hiring issues that impact hiring and retention, as shown in the following subtheme.

### ***Retention Challenges***

The study shows that employees in middle-management (scales 7 and 6) or above (scales 5 and 4) are on the verge of leaving the MPS. The statistical data in the table below (Table 17) shows that *'experienced staff have left without giving a clear reason'* (health = 62%, finance = 56%, ICT and digital media = 81%), while the least important factor *'employees being poached by former employers'* (health = 2%, Finance = 17%, ICT = 12%).

Table 16: Reasons for Skills Shortages in Sectors

Reasons:	Health	Finance	ICT
<b>1. Experienced staff have left</b>	62%	56%	81%
<b>2. Experienced staff have retired or are about to retire</b>	45%	44%	19%
<b>3. Inability to attract new entrants to the industry</b>	31%	39%	41%
<b>4. A change in the job requirements of staff is needed</b>	22%	22%	17%
<b>5. Lack of qualified apprentices/students</b>	19%	22%	31%
<b>6. Employees being poached by competitors</b>	17%	39%	62%

<b>7. Apprentice/Trainee left their employment on completion of attaining higher qualifications</b>	15%	11%	12%
<b>8. Employees being poached by former employers</b>	2%	17%	12%
<b>9. Other (please specify)</b>	20%	23%	27%

The percentages are derived from an agreement with the statements.

The literature indicated that experienced public sector employees receive too little administrative support, and experienced employees quit their jobs because they do not learn new skills to improve their performance or do not earn enough (Cregård & Corin, 2019). In this study, 71% of SPOs argued that their salary *‘does not compensate for the work we do’*.

The 20-scale concertina (job tenure) (see subsection 1.2.2, p.6) has become too restrictive to retain and attract professional staff. Maltese coaches argued that the *‘brain drain’* over the last eight years had become a significant challenge for SPOs, as they *‘frequently move from one Ministry to another.’* No available source or publication shows whether the MPS measures its turnover. If there were, we could have investigated whether employee turnover is the root cause of poor leadership.

Although part of the problem stems from organisational flaws, as the study suggests, a larger part is due to a lack of technical expertise and managerial competencies. For example, the study shows that SPOs rely on outdated information and find that their superiors use jargon words that are difficult to understand. To improve their internal systems, processes and procedures, two-thirds of respondents said they need experienced bosses to share their technical skills and expertise:

*‘Our seniors use a lot of jargon that is too vague, making it extremely difficult to understand, and they mostly rely on outdated information.’* [SPO, ICT]

An SPO from the financial sector commented:

*'We need experienced seniors to use their knowledge and share their expertise with those less experienced. This would help us improve our internal systems, processes, and procedures.'* [SPO, Finance]

Staff experiences were also discussed with ICIs. One coach stated that *'every replacement comes at a cost, apart from the fact that investment and resources are lost with the departure.'* Some other coaches remarked that employee retention is the responsibility of SPOs, as they need to voice what is bothering them so their superiors can fix issues, but only if SPOs are allowed to speak. Another coach added that *'although staff retention and development are important, a little staff turnover is inevitable, but at the same time healthy, as it brings in new blood and innovative ideas.'*

The number of employees who leave the company within a given period is known as the optimal turnover rate, while the retention rate refers to the percentage of employees who stay with the company over a longer time. According to a MISCO Statistics report (2021), Malta's annual separation or turnover rate was 10% in 2021. Maltese human resources management considers this normal, healthy, and higher than the EU average of 7.5% (MISCO, 2021).

#### **4.4.2 Key Aspects of Coaching – Purposes, Processes, and Outcome (Theme 2)**

This section presents the study findings related to SPOs' competencies acquired through coaching support (objective 4). The main topics covered in this section are (i) coaching for leadership effectiveness and development and (ii) coaching engagements.

##### ***Coaching for Leadership Effectiveness and Development***

Growth in one's personal development comes from both competence and commitment. Competence refers to the level of knowledge, skill, ability, and experience related to a specific task. These developmental stages have different needs; they require distinct leadership styles to provide support and guidance that can be applied to different areas (Grant, 2017; Matsuo et al., 2020). SPOs in healthcare, finance, ICT and digital media

were asked to indicate what skills they thought leaders should have. Responses in [Table 17](#) were coded and classified into two categories: (i) intellectual and (ii) interpersonal skills.

Table 17: Effective Leadership Skills

<b>Intellectual skills</b>	<b>Interpersonal skills</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analytical skills</li> <li>- Decision-making</li> <li>- Good writing skills</li> <li>- Knowledge of the department</li> <li>- Technological knowledge</li> <li>- Time management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Able to communicate non-verbally</li> <li>- Be an agent of change</li> <li>- Breed team spirit</li> <li>- Empathise</li> <li>- Get the best out of human resources</li> <li>- Have people-oriented skills</li> <li>- Instil confidence</li> <li>- Listening skills</li> <li>- Make a person feel at ease</li> <li>- Respect for people</li> </ul>

The table above shows the skills public officials expect leaders to have. SPOs accentuate that a leader should be people-oriented and have excellent communication and interpersonal skills. Some specific skills needed were described as *‘being a good listener,’ ‘being open to criticism,’ ‘being up-to-date,’* and *‘writing less and speaking more.’* While 64% of SPOs felt that *‘trusting one’s instincts’* was a critical component of effective leadership, 37% said that taking time to listen to people was paramount. A cross-tabulation was created for the three sectors ([Table 18](#)) to compare how SPOs view these variables.

Table 18: Comparison of Views on Effective Leadership Skills in Sectors

<b>LEADERSHIP SKILLS</b>			
<b>Occupational Sectors within the MPS</b>	<b>Health (n = 145)</b>	<b>Finance (n = 22)</b>	<b>ICT (n = 55)</b>
<b>INTELLECTUAL SKILLS</b>			
<b>Analytical skills</b>	36%	30%	34%
<b>Decision-making</b>	49%	32%	19%

<b>Good writing skills</b>	37%	33%	30%
<b>Knowledge of the department</b>	52%	28%	20%
<b>Technological knowledge</b>	32%	31%	37%
<b>Time management</b>	38%	29%	33%
<b>INTERPERSONAL SKILLS</b>			
<b>Able to communicate non-verbally</b>	41%	27%	32%
<b>Be an agent of change</b>	34%	31%	35%
<b>Breed team spirit</b>	48%	20%	32%
<b>Empathise</b>	50%	30%	20%
<b>Get the best out of human resources</b>	47%	28%	25%
<b>Have people-oriented skills</b>	43%	32%	25%
<b>Instil confidence</b>	37%	36%	27%
<b>Listening skills</b>	38%	33%	29%
<b>Make a person feel at ease</b>	40%	38%	22%
<b>Respect for people</b>	51%	23%	26%

The table above illustrates that knowledge of the department comes first in the healthcare profession, followed by respect for people and empathy. Empathy in healthcare is key to improving the patient experience. The healthcare profession is a traditional profession that deals with life-or-death situations. Patients believe they receive the best care when their care team is empathetic and compassionate. This study shows that skills and performance in the health professions outweigh the administrative aspect of leadership, so coaches in these areas may be needed to strengthen their clinical skills. On the other hand, the finance sector is a long-established and respected profession where managers are expected to be trained when they start their job. In finance, coaching may focus on basic financial needs and typically take a more personal, hands-on approach to working with clients.

The ICT and digital media sector place more emphasis on technological knowledge, followed by the ability to use analytical skills and be an agent of change. Examples of

these two cases are public service workers with ICT diplomas, who are spurred on by wages much higher than postgraduates and occupy managerial positions, and government employees with postgraduate qualifications, who work at lower clerical and administrative levels well below their skill level. For example, the ICT sector is evolving due to recent advances in blockchain (Deloitte Malta, 2019) and artificial intelligence (AI) (Malta Independent, 2019). Coaching in this area may need to comply with the European Union (EU) regulatory framework to change working patterns and provide training opportunities to increase IT skills (at both a basic and advanced level).

Furthermore, two SPOs pointed out the importance of being involved, taking responsibility and providing the necessary feedback.

*'As a leader, it is necessary to participate and take responsibility for one's actions.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'... particularly experienced SPOs who need to be augmented (to help). From my experience, they gave me a lot of coaching (a tonne of feedback).'* [SPO, Healthcare]

More than half of SPOs (58%) stated that *'engagement, responsibility and participation'* within the MPS only exist at the top management level. From these results, it can be concluded that there is an awareness of a mix of generic and specific skills, which seems to mirror those found in the general management literature (Hickman & Akdere, 2018) and provide insights for personal and professional development.

SPOs are happier working for leaders who can take ownership of their leadership development; this is a professional intervention in which a coach helps the coachee become a more effective leader (Dwyer, 2019). Some other authors (Cooper, 2018; Pawar et al., 2020) place leadership development coaching within a broader coaching category, considering it as a supportive relationship to improve the coachee's performance and job satisfaction. This study finds that one-third of SPOs had received leadership coaching that helped them improve their personal and professional skills, but this occurred outside the public service.

Data from the survey shows that 33% of SPOs yearn to strengthen their leadership and communication skills in their sectors and respond positively to taking up leadership roles. Two SPOs from the ICT and finance sectors supported a blended approach of guided and independent training for leadership development outside the office:

*'The most important trait I have developed in my department is listening rather than talking, which has been challenging. By allowing others to voice their ideas, I learnt how to evaluate people much better.'* [SPO, ICT]

*'Many functional leadership skills can be cultivated outside of the workplace that only manifest themselves through private coaching.'* [SPO, Finance]

Two healthcare SPOs reported that they now feel 'more like a coach' following private coaching and are *'better prepared to serve their team.'* These results are like those of Einzig (2017) and Hendrikz and Engelbrecht (2019). Two other SPOs from the ICT and digital media sector complemented these views:

*'I have boosted my self-confidence through private coaching. It has helped me connect with different people and made everyone feel included.'* [SPO, ICT]

*'I feel fortunate to work in a department that encourages and facilitates participation in continuing education and professional growth.'* [SPO, ICT]

Coaching leaders can help their coaches deepen their insights and encourage them to follow a structured dialogue, network, and contribute to continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives. This shows coaching's importance for closing the management and leadership skills gap in the MPS by providing appropriate skills and capabilities within the service. However, this relies heavily on the ability of leaders in the service to support effective coaching engagements.

### ***Coaching Engagements***

During in-depth interviews with ICIs, various questions were asked about their coaching practice, background, and practice experience in Malta with the private and public sectors, etc. Different perspectives were exchanged: *'... individuals enter the*

*profession for the wrong reasons before making it to retirement* [ICI 4], and those with *wrong intentions are now influencing the older generations* [ICI 7].

According to ICIs, the typical length of coaching engagements in Malta varies from as little as one month to over three years. By far, the most popular time frame, as confirmed by ICIs (Figure 10), was two to six months (whether or not such services were provided in the private or public sector); except that public sector coaching engagements can sometimes take longer, due to the existing government bureaucracy (issuing of permits and ‘red tape’).

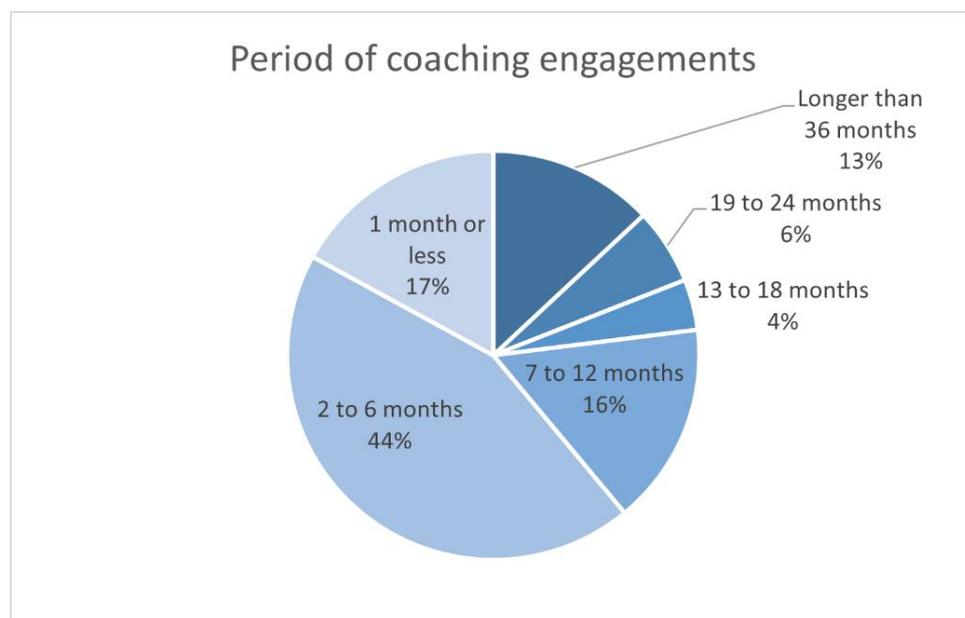


Figure 10: Coaching Engagements

We now present the SPOs’ views on coaching engagements and expectations.

A healthcare SPO said, *‘there are individuals among us who can develop at a young age; they are dedicated and energetic.’* Similarly, an SPO from the finance sector opined that *‘connectivity is a critical component to employee engagement,’* adding that *‘... the cost or benefit to developing a culture of engagement within sectors is communication.’* The respondent further remarked: *‘... when you allow your employees to share, discuss their concerns and stay connected, they are likely to be more engaged and do their jobs efficiently and effectively.’*

An ICT and digital media SPO described employee engagement in terms of ‘*how much time it takes to learn and get the job done*’ and ‘*how a talented leader is well prepared for the job.*’ When an organisation develops a culture of engagement, employee satisfaction follows. The same respondent concluded that ‘*... a culture of engagement should allow leaders to plan for their future and to invest in their careers.*’ This is part of the development process that would encourage deeper learning and greater job satisfaction. [Table 19](#) below shows SPOs’ responses on what they expect from a coaching leader during the engagement process. This question was important because it relates to the fourth objective of the study.

Table 19: What Do You Expect from a Coaching Leader during Engagements?

<b>SPOs, Healthcare Sector</b>	<b>SPOs, Finance Sector</b>	<b>SPOs, ICT and DM Sector</b>
<i>‘Regardless of whether the coaching is delivered internally or externally, the coaching leader needs to be fully engaged, open about what they are to say, be fully involved, anticipate results and, most importantly, be honest in the approach.’</i>	<i>‘We need competent seniors who are dynamic in their approach, have strong communication skills and can engage with employees.’</i>	<i>‘Having someone who can offer diverse perspectives is crucial. We need someone we can trust and listen to.’</i>
<i>‘What I have done in the past and what I am doing now remains relevant. During the coaching, I engage with my subordinates as much as possible.’</i>	<i>‘In these roles, few people oppose you, especially the Gozitans. They remain silent at times. But that is part of their culture, I suppose. But I do encourage them to speak up.’</i>	<i>‘To have a meaningful conversation with my superiors, I look for someone with more experience than me; a person who brings new perspectives.’</i>
<i>‘It is important to give yourself enough time to receive sufficient feedback.’</i>	<i>‘I believe in constructive criticism. When my colleagues speak, they follow a train of thought that allows me to see things from different perspectives, so I try to explore new avenues.’</i>	<i>‘I treat my seniors in the same way I want to be treated. I want them to be straight with me but also to give me some space to clarify issues and better understand my role as an SPO.’</i>

From the above responses, this researcher deduced the main characteristics ([Figure 11](#)) that emerged from the survey, as perceived by these respondents.

*Qualified and experienced:* The extent to which trust is enhanced depends on how SPOs view the qualifications and experiences of the coaching leader. Perhaps a coach or a leader who has knowledge and experience will succeed. Kusumatantya et al.

(2021) found that insufficient professional credibility was detrimental to job performance and resulted in lower satisfaction scores. Business, managerial leadership, leadership and political skills, and coaching skills, can represent important credibility factors in the MPS setting and can be crucial for developing productive and reliable connections inside the MPS.

*Honest and trustworthy:* These elements give concerned parties the sense of comfort they need to manage expectations, set boundaries, and create honest and open communication. In a coaching relationship, honesty and trust create a secure setting that encourages personal development, but a lack of trust leads to lower job satisfaction (Whitley et al., 2018). Within the MPS context, when trust is present, SPOs may be more inclined to share confidential information, and seniors may exert more control over their subordinates. Conversely, betrayal of trust is associated with resistance to change and lower satisfaction (Papanthymou & Darra, 2019).

*Good communication skills:* One interpersonal skill that distinguishes many managers is expressiveness in communicating with others. When managers are silent and uncommunicative, their subordinates are likely to be the same (Mollman & Candela, 2018). In the MPS context, communication behaviour is reflected at the highest level in all Government Departments. Perhaps the most common communication flaw is the upward flow of information. SPOs' suggestions and opinions can be regarded as important organisational assets that can contribute to increased efficiency and effectiveness. The opportunity for SPOs to communicate upwards can be expanded if seniors take the time to visit their work environment and listen to them.

*Open for confidential discussions:* Given that coaching is about learning and self-development (Froehlich et al., 2017; Yenziaras et al., 2020), it makes sense that public leaders who serve as coaches adopt best practices from their disciplinary roles to help coaches become open to confidential discussions. SPOs would probably appreciate the questioning and leadership style. They will likely value the discussion and the performance benefits if they have something to gain and look forward to. On the other hand, leaders could help the people they coach consider both the new and the old by reminding them of possibilities and sharing their own experiences and multidisciplinary learnings. Coaching could thus earn its place as a learning tool by

requiring individuals to analyse their assumptions, historical preferences, and habits that may help their future development.

*Provides continuous feedback:* The coaching leader can use confrontational approaches to help SPOs identify and take ownership of the challenges encountered. The coaching phase includes follow-up sessions to review progress, examine interactions between public officials, offer advice and support, and ultimately aid SPOs in evaluating the results of the coaching process. The type of coach used, internal or external, affects this process. Both external and internal coaches have their pros and cons. External coaches usually cost more, but some public leaders think they are more objective.

On the other hand, internal coaches cost less and understand the organisation's culture but may be viewed as a confidentiality risk (Schalk & Landeta, 2017; St John-Brooks, 2019). One might consider choosing the right person and approach that will result in an overall strategy with clear objectives. This could be done by combining constant feedback to increase self-awareness with the support of a skilled coach. With the right feedback tools, high-potential employees can further improve their personal and professional development skills and their sector's growth.



Figure 11: Coaching Engagements as Perceived by SPOs

The five components discussed in the above framework relate to improved workplace engagement if people are motivated. When someone is motivated, their commitment is reflected in their work. Conversely, if an employee or manager is not engaged, they will rarely perform as expected. Overwork, pressure, urgency, and high demands can lead to an unrelenting pace at MPS. One may observe from the findings that SPOs are exhausted with overwork (theme 4, subtheme 2). Resources and time are issues raised in earlier discussions. SPOs and senior leaders may need to slow down and think through the complexities of the issues and the implications of their decisions. They may need to be clear about how to act, the impact their actions might have on their staff and organisational culture (OC), and how these factors may impact their leadership relationships. This further highlights the importance of coaching to close the management and leadership skills gap.

#### **4.4.3 Coaching for Systematic Talent Development (Theme 3)**

This study aimed to determine whether coaching could be used as a professional learning opportunity (amongst other active forms of professional development (PD)) to help reduce the significant skills gap within the MPS. For this project, the researcher sought to identify the different types of coaching within the MPS and how practitioners in Malta perceive coaching. This section will answer two critical questions (i) ‘How can coaching respond to the senior leadership skills gap?’ and (ii) ‘How can coaching within the MPS develop the next generation of talent and transform its leaders?’

##### ***How Can Coaching Respond to the Senior Leadership Skills Gap?***

Whether through teaching, facilitated, collaborative or blended learning or coaching, the *raison d’être* of the learning process is to equip managers and leaders with the right skills and attributes to enhance the organisation’s ability to manage gaps in the talent pipeline. How to deal with skills gaps depends on the root cause of the problem (theme 1, subtheme 2). As we learnt from SPOs, skill gaps are the leading cause of the negative impact of current technological advances, lack of human and financial resources in MPS, and general working conditions. On the other hand, Maltese coaches have claimed these gaps have become visible because of the difficulties arising from external market conditions and the skills mismatch between individuals and organisations. Besides the problems claimed by study subjects, there could be other

difficulties. For example, perhaps some skills are not being developed in Malta because academics have strayed too far from what is happening in the real business world or because the skills needed in the market are changing too quickly. It could also be that most managers do not transfer what they have learnt from the available learning mechanisms and do not apply it in the workplace.

Over the past two decades, several researchers have tried to figure out whether organisations can make coaching a part of their talent management (TM) strategy (Szedlak et al., 2021; Van Wart, 2019). In this study, three ICIs described talent in a coaching environment as *'organisational support for practice,'* ensuring that *'the right policies are in place'* and that *'a defined strategic implementation plan follows decision-making processes.'*

Some insightful coaching research (Boysen et al., 2018; de Haan, 2019) has focused on measurements and metrics. These studies suggest that coaching can be effective in certain areas, but one needs to choose the right strategy for implementation and the proper time frame, from the initial to the end stages of coaching. This researcher asked ICIs about their broad experiences to gain insights into measurements and metrics. The researcher also asked about the frameworks they use for measurement: *'... the schedule will vary depending on who is assigned to the project and the goals to be achieved.'*

The study suggests that managers/leaders need to ensure projects are coordinated through measurement plans that assess the effectiveness of their features. The following ICIs shared their views on this aspect:

*'Organisations need to create measurement plans. You know... you should be evaluating everything from profits and liabilities to minimising wasteful organisational expenses.'* [ICI 20]

*'I think that not all functions and activities can be measured, but a qualitative analysis could be helpful by asking the coachees about their perceptions of the observed changes in the workplace.'* [ICI 10]

*'Surveys could be conducted anonymously to obtain data with more clarity.'* [ICI 11]

On similar lines, typical comments suggested by four ICIs were:

*'The most accurate way to measure performance depends on the sector you work in, the goals you are trying to achieve and the people you are evaluating. Coaching should be aligned with organisational goals to bridge the gaps between existing goals and actual performance.'* [ICI 1]

*'Organisations need to understand how much they should invest in, and whether coaching can meet organisational expectations and whether it will help leaders grow.'* [ICI 13]

*'I firmly believe that these outcomes are difficult to measure because they are not just numbers in a spreadsheet. The actual values of both qualitative and quantitative metrics vary from company to company. However, it is crucial to know the company's expectations.'* [ICI 14]

*'... the main purpose of coaching should be more than a positive exercise to encourage the coachees to try harder... I think it should focus on achieving remarkable results....'* [ICI 17]

From these responses, ICIs demonstrate a culture of awareness and responsibility for their role. The literature (Cornelius et al., 2020) shows that awareness and responsibility are potent drivers of coaching that supports self-development.

As most ICIs claimed, *'coaching assignments are carried out within a specific period of time'* and are usually *'... determined by a prior contract agreement.'* From interviews with coaches, we learnt that certain features in such coaching contracts include the purpose of the coaching, estimated resources, time commitment, confidentiality, methods, approaches and costs.

*'If unforeseen circumstances arise that may prolong the process, an extended timeframe will be agreed, with follow-up discussions on new plans and SWOT analysis'* [ICI 17].

*'... the process can take a while... As a coach, you need to persevere and adopt a fixed mindset'* [ICI 11].

Organisations that make coaching part of their TM strategy can improve OC. Maltese coaches have defined talent in a coaching environment as *'organisational support for practice,'* ensuring *'the right policies are in place,'* and that *'... a defined strategic implementation plan follows the decision-making processes.'* Although coaching can be effective in certain areas, one must choose the right strategy for implementation and the appropriate time frame from the initial to the final stages of coaching. We learn from this study that the time frame varies depending on who is tasked with the project and the goals to be achieved. One can use pre-to-post measurement plans to ensure the effectiveness of coaching projects.

Coaching can respond to the senior leadership skills gap by helping SPOs, and senior managers shift their management style from command-and-control to a collaborative and participatory style. Organisations that make coaching part of their TM strategy can improve OC (Schein & Schein, 2019; Whybrow & Nottingham, 2018). From the SPOs' data, we can infer that the barriers to developing a coaching culture within MPS are not primarily with senior management but at the middle-management level. We will see in (theme 6, subtheme 3) that employees are more resistant to coaching than managers.

From the following discussions (theme 4, subtheme 1), we will learn that SPOs are still influenced by the traditional leadership style that represents a 'boss-centric culture', and just over half of the SPOs considered directive leadership approaches to be more effective than coaching (theme 6, subtheme 2). Despite decades of teaching about traditional leadership and employee motivation, SPOs struggle to make a lasting impact on their teams. A key reason SPOs struggle with their roles is that they cannot balance the demands of their responsibilities with life commitments. SPOs have been reported to have an excessive sense of responsibility, over-commitment, and the challenge of balancing work demands with personal life. Effective leadership requires persuasion and effective communication. SPOs in the three sectors still seem to struggle with this issue. ICIs described effective leadership as *'having good leadership skills, initiating change and bringing the best out of people.'*

## ***How Can Coaching within the MPS Develop the Next Generation of Talent and Transform its Leaders?***

Coaching can help public leaders develop into ‘transformational leaders.’ These leaders can share a common purpose with their subordinates by inspiring and engaging others. Coaching can help public leaders become more self-aware, understand their vulnerabilities, become more compassionate, focus on their team, and become more resilient. Coaching can also provide a space for reflection, for public leaders to explore their roles and the ever-changing challenges in their environments.

The literature (Finkelstein et al., 2018; Kwon & Jang, 2021) demonstrates that coaching is a complex, idiosyncratic phenomenon required to develop high-potential individuals (HIPOs) through coaching and leadership development programmes. HIPOs are individuals with the potential, ability, and aspiration to assume successive leadership positions (Stinebaugh, 2021). When asked how organisations identify HIPO talent, Maltese coaches replied that public and private institutions look for ‘committed,’ ‘hard workers,’ and ‘innovative’ employees. These features (Figure 12) appeared when coding the coaching data with the survey data.



Figure 12: HIPO characteristics as defined by study subjects

As shown in the figure above, the study participants emphasised the ability aspect, which is why this item was placed at the top of the chart. HIPOs can develop new working patterns and take on more meaningful challenges, enhancing their followers' abilities to respond to intellectual stimulation and motivation. This motivation pushes participants to put more effort into problem-solving techniques and to participate in innovative projects (Andriani et al., 2018). Table 20 below shows that the more people associate with HIPOs, the higher their manifestation score will be. Broadly speaking, the degree of manifestation of qualities is highly manifested, as shown in the overall weighted mean of 3.97.

Table 20: Summary of the Degree of Manifestation of HIPOs' Characteristics

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Rating</b>
1. Ability	4.01	Highly Manifested
2. Qualified, Accountable and Committed	3.99	Highly Manifested
3. Hardworking, Flexible and Proactive	3.97	Highly Manifested
4. Motivated, Creative, Excellent Negotiators	3.96	Highly Manifested
5. Respecting People, Thinking outside the Box, Connecting Teams	3.95	Highly Manifested
6. Learn, Develop, and Share Experiences, Solution-Oriented	3.94	Highly Manifested
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.97</b>	<b>Highly Manifested</b>

More precisely, HIPO features with the highest manifestation, according to mean scale values, are: ability (4.01); qualified, accountable and committed (3.99); hardworking, flexible and proactive (3.97); motivated, creative, excellent negotiators (3.96); respecting people, think outside the box, connecting teams (3.95). On the other hand, the indicator with the lowest manifestation, but still rated as highly manifested, is learn, develop, and share experiences, solution-oriented, with a mean scale value of 3.94.

When asked what types of talent and coaching strategies companies look for, ICIs cited these variables: (i) leadership programmes that promote personal and professional development, (ii) performance measurement strategies (technical and non-technical), (iii) goal measurements, (iv) resource management, and (v) training. This coaching data has been intentionally coded to show how Malta sectors prioritise their TD process.

Another key issue raised during interview sessions with coaches was the aspect of succession planning (SP). This is one of the most crucial functions of coaching to help organisations develop talent for succession. ICIs view SP as critical in changing organisational structures and systems – from reactive SP to proactive, strategic, and systematic solutions. Talent development (TD) drives SP by attracting, retaining and developing leaders within the same organisation. Coaching might be the most effective way for public leaders to guide TD. During the interview sessions, two participants remarked:

*'There should be an action plan to address succession planning and an overhaul of structures and systems... I think that if we provide an unclouded vision and direction, the quality of our future leaders will improve... When that happens, staff get motivated, will work as a team, and influence each other to develop.'* [ICI 3]

*'Succession planning is vital... any bias will resolve itself as long as the right candidate is found for the right job....'* [ICI 12]

The literature (Fusarelli et al., 2018; Kohestany & Yaghoubi, 2017) suggests that public sector organisations often face high attrition rates of skilled talent and rarely implement SP programmes for executives. This study validates this view, as no development programmes are available for SPOs other than the senior management toolkit. Articulating the skills and competencies needed for leadership roles provides the added benefit of identifying skill gaps and training needs. It is crucial to have methods to discover and convey this information. Overlaying skills provides many of the same benefits as developing complementary skills for SP.

An important principle emphasised by most ICIs was that a coach should have *'leadership qualities,' 'be competent and act with integrity,' 'have confidence and inspire others,' 'be committed and enthusiastic,' 'communicate well', and 'be decisive.'* Integrity and competence have become essential concepts that have gained prominence in government practice research (de Graaf et al., 2018). Leaders with integrity and competence are an asset to organisations and are considered more effective than leaders who lack both qualities.

*'When choosing a coach, one should look at their professional background, leadership skills and experience.'* [ICI 6]

*'I introduced coaching in healthcare just before Mater Dei Hospital opened. I wanted to be involved in succession planning and developing internal talent. Based on my experience, today I value coaching more than ever. It is a leadership intervention useful for the development of high potentials.'* [ICI 16]

While coaching teaches leaders how to grow and develop people's potential, there might be difficult personalities to deal with; this requires the competencies and techniques to control negative personalities, narcissists, blamers, and much more. Beyond transformative leadership, SPOs might need the leadership skills to calmly and analytically resolve any resistance to change by showing empathy and emotional intelligence without anger or disbelief. This further emphasises the longer-term coaching role in closing the management and leadership skills gap by providing superior leadership skills and TD opportunities.

The problem is that while traditional training teaches people a wide range of information and concepts, it does not help them to analyse, prioritise and reorganise new information. Critical thinking skills are needed to create long-term emancipatory transformation and support coaching practice development. ICIs agree that *'there is a need for a coach who can help top management understand what they are saying and doing and then find possible solutions.'* This includes examining the possible meaning and significance of claims, asking questions, considering alternative approaches, and making informed decisions.

While a lack of critical thinking in the private sector could jeopardise the business or bankrupt a company, this deficiency in the public service could lead to litigation, penalties, and resignations of high-key positions. While this attribute is questionable in the case of those who still hold positions of trust when they have become corrupted, critical thinking in the workplace can develop solutions for public leaders that can be free of any stereotypes (Kolditz, 2022).

A few ICIs mentioned the challenges they face when approached by SPOs about goal setting and behaviour issues. Coaches argued that ‘... *they usually come up with innovative ideas but get discouraged when things do not go as planned,*’ and that ‘... *these managers live in mental paradigms,*’ ‘... *they do not show signs of curiosity,*’ ‘... *they just focus on reasons and limitations.*’ According to the literature (Homan Blanchard & Miller 2010; Van Genderen 2014), curiosity creates awareness and nurtures hidden talents.

Interestingly, the comments above align with the descriptions of some scholars (Christensen et al., 2020; Martin, 2018), who claims that a public service leader should have the right qualities of leadership, general management and good governance. This study suggests that public leaders must set a personal example of integrity and take reasonable steps to prevent management and organisational failures, including the potential risks of favouritism and corruption. Transformational leadership could reduce the problem of corruption and make the MPS responsive if public officials get the proper training. Such measures may include:

*Ethical training and awareness:* There is a growing trend among public service organisations to provide ethical training and awareness programmes for their employees. The reasoning behind this trend is twofold. First, public officials are entrusted with a great deal of power and responsibility and should therefore be capable of handling this power ethically and responsibly. Second, the public has increasingly high expectations for the ethical conduct of public officials, and organisations that provide ethical training and awareness programmes can help to meet these expectations.

Various approaches can be taken to ethical training and awareness in public service. One common approach is to provide educational programmes that focus on the legal

and regulatory framework governing the conduct of public officials. Another approach is to provide more practical training that focuses on identifying and responding to ethical challenges that may arise in one's work. Whichever approach is taken, public officials should be given the opportunity to learn about ethics in a way relevant to their work.

*Being alert for signals of financial constraints:* Governments at all levels are under increasing pressure to do more with less. Financial constraints are becoming more common in the public sector. These constraints can manifest in several ways, including cuts to staff and programmes, reductions in benefits and services, and delays in capital projects. While financial constraints are not always easy to spot, certain warning signs can show when they are present. For example, if government officials suddenly become less accessible or responsive, it may be a sign that they are under strain. Likewise, if there is a sudden drop in the quality of public services, it may be due to financial constraints. Being alert for these and other signals can help hold their government accountable and ensure vital services are not cut back during fiscal tightening.

*Enforcing laws and regulations:* There are a variety of laws and regulations that public service organisations must comply with. Failure to do so can result in significant penalties, including fines and suspension of operations. To ensure compliance, public service organisations can have an enforcement mechanism. This can be an internal compliance unit or an external body such as a regulatory agency. The enforcement mechanism is responsible for investigating potential breaches and taking action where necessary. This may involve issuing warning notices, imposing sanctions or taking legal action. By having an effective enforcement mechanism in place, public service organisations can help to make sure they are following all relevant laws and regulations.

*Penalising those who engage in misbehaviour and corruption:* In many countries, public officials are expected to adhere to a code of conduct that prohibits misbehaviour and corruption. However, these codes are often violated with impunity. To effectively discourage such violations, it is essential to have consequences in place for those who engage in them. One way to do this is by penalising those guilty of misbehaviour or corruption in public service. This may result in financial penalties, duty suspension, or even public service dismissal. By sending a strong message that such behaviour will

not be tolerated, it is possible to create a deterrent effect that can help to reduce the incidence of misbehaviour and corruption in public service.

## **4.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

**‘What awareness or understanding of coaching practices do Maltese SPOs and coaches have?’**

### **4.5.1 Organisational Culture of the MPS (Theme 4)**

OC has been instrumental in understanding the MPS’s skill gaps. It is crucial to consider the potential use of coaching to address the resulting issues around systematic TD. Data from the questionnaires show that 54% of SPOs are qualified below the bachelor’s degree level; some hold the title of ‘manager’ despite having only a post-secondary education. This indicates that SPOs within the MPS may be underqualified for their roles. According to an SPO from the healthcare sector, seniors in top positions *‘do not have the required competencies.’* The following subthemes present the findings related to the OC of the MPS, which were categorised into three broad sections: (i) a boss-centric culture; (ii) the politicised nature of the senior and middle-management roles; and (iii) political corruption, nepotism and favouritism.

#### ***A Boss-Centric Culture***

Eighty-five per cent of respondents said their primary source of stress at work was their direct superiors. Those SPOs who described very poor to fairly poor relationships with their bosses reported lower job satisfaction than those with very good to fairly good relationships. According to Kniffin et al. (2020), a boss has decision-making powers and the authority to direct the tasks of subordinates. Bosses include managers, supervisors and leaders, all terms used interchangeably in the literature. An SPO in the finance sector suggested a traditional understanding of what it means to be a ‘boss’:

*‘As we go up the ladder, it is like snakes and ladders; today, you are in the higher grade or scale; tomorrow, you will be in a lower grade. This is how the assimilation of SPOs works in public service. Over the last five years, I have seen people in leadership positions do what they want, as they please. They do it because their political*

*background makes them feel powerful. I lead by example, and I make sure people follow my instructions under my watch.* [SPO, Finance]

Doing what one pleases and wielding power based on a political background are attributes that may lead to corruption, nepotism and favouritism. This is echoed in Daphne Caruana Galizia's murder, which exposed corruption networks in higher authorities (BBC News, 2021).

Many survey respondents reported that their superiors lack managerial and leadership skills, spread aggressive rumours, and use inappropriate language towards SPOs. This researcher refers to these abnormalities as toxic. This does not mean that lack of skills makes a leader toxic. However, when someone abuses their power or control over another person and causes harm or suffering, the abuser shows signs of indifference, incompetence, discrimination and corruption – all elements Carlson (2022) identified as toxic determinants.

An SPO from the finance sector reported that *'bosses exercise so much authority that they think they know everything, and their way is the only way.'* This outcome shows an excessive level of autocratic leadership, creating fear and unquestioning compliance risk, which may cause people to act unethically (Carlson, 2022). While managers organise work and processes to achieve results, leaders are expected to motivate their teams and support employees to reach their full potential. The available evidence from the survey provides compelling evidence that a traditional leadership style of management is used within the MPS, and middle managers are expected to solve problems and tell their people what to do.

*'I have to be very direct and specific. In this role, you must be concise and explain everything as it is. To be frank with you, I often pressure them to meet deadlines, so I have to tell them exactly what to do and how to do it, as this Government often hires inexperienced people.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

It is clear from the above statement that public officials are still wedded to transactional leaders, contrary to what modern organisations worldwide expect of their leaders (Seok & Chung, 2022). A typical example was:

*'We are dealing here with public policies and government procedures. If we do not do them, we get the blame. I have to be very direct ... at times, I admit, I am unpleasant to work with'* [SPO, Healthcare]

To develop a coaching culture or to encourage a leader to coach, it may be a good idea to identify what type of culture already exists. Is it fixed or growth-oriented? What does this leader think about people's ability to change?' Two healthcare SPOs reported that their seniors feel *'more like a coach'* and are now *'better prepared to serve their team.'*

According to Cunningham (2021), leaders are not just responsible for creating and managing culture; they also have a significant role in transforming the organisation through their ability to understand how it works. SPOs know that changing Maltese culture is difficult because some traditions will be hard or impossible to change, but this does not stop them from trying.

The results were inconclusive regarding whether transformative or transactional leadership styles were preferred. Although private sector research on transformative leadership has shown positive correlations with OC (Liu & Kianto, 2021; Odor, 2018), the public sector may need a mix of transformational and transactional leadership theories. Some SPOs reported positive leadership practices mentioned in the literature, which deal with transformational leadership: communication, decision-making, teamwork, trust, and commitment.

We learn that transactional leaders use directive approaches to achieve organisational goals, but transformational leaders aim to empower employees to make increasingly better decisions on their own initiative to improve organisational effectiveness and productivity. Implicit in this is the recognition that the organisation's culture needs to change/improve. However, it is also essential to acknowledge that more than half of SPOs preferred directive leadership, thus showing that this leadership is potentially more appropriate in some situations, particularly when strongly aligned with the OC. Whitmore's (2002:10) view of coaching relates directly to transformative leadership. However, within the MPS, it is not easy to coach or to value coaching practices since

the roles and responsibilities of SPOs appear to be politicised, as we will explore in the following section.

### ***Politicised Nature of the Senior and Middle-Management Roles***

The study also provided evidence to suggest that SPOs within the MPS are exhausted with the workload. Their roles and responsibilities depend on the ministries' intervention in the day-to-day operations of the departments:

*'SPOs have more than enough work on their plates... we feel exhausted, and many of us have burnout issues.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'We are tired, and most of the time, we are forced to work overtime due to a shortage of staff and backlogs.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'When I come back home after a night shift, all I want to do is sleep. I feel like I'm existing, not living.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

The feeling of having too much on one's plate is a discouraging, frustrating and stressful factor that multiple individuals from the study reported. Evidence suggests this problem is related to several undesirable organisational factors, including lower organisational commitment (Day et al., 2017), negative behaviours (Ghavidel et al., 2019), and high staff turnover and absenteeism (Koo et al., 2020). Two SPOs from the finance sector and one SPO from ICT commented:

*'Any action we take as SPOs must be referred to the Ministry. I am not talking about legal requirements here, but simple everyday tasks.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'We are surrounded by arrogant and stupid people. This is why absenteeism is high in our sector'* [SPO, Finance]

*'My direct boss was a pretty mean person. The easiest way for him to defend himself was to strike first. He shouted, ranting and raving. I was devastated; therefore, I felt frustrated and furious.'* [SPO, ICT]

The above statements, combined with similar views from other SPOs, imply that senior management lack trust and confidence in the roles and responsibilities of SPOs, and restricts their actions using autocratic leadership styles.

There is less transparency and communication when people do not have confidence and trust. This leads to low innovation and a lack of agility and responsiveness to changing conditions. SPOs seem to avoid communicating with their superiors in such administrative positions because they fear retaliation or do not trust public leaders. The reasoning behind the politicisation of upper and middle-management roles within the MPS is that Maltese public leaders *'... take a political stance as part of their regular managerial roles to improve the flow of communication between government agendas (electoral manifestos, etc.) and the administrative powers and activities of the public service'* [ICI 20]. According to an ICT and digital media SPO, *'the issue to separate policy objectives from administrative functions seems remote today.'*

The Government's priorities are based on legal mandates, but the functioning of government in a volatile environment seems to be an exceptional scenario. The pressures on SPOs' shoulders often make them feel anxious, marginalised and less inclined to take part in their development within the MPS:

*'Behind many fears is the worry about doing something wrong, looking stupid or not meeting expectations, that sometimes makes us not bother to seek professional development.'* [SPO, ICT]

This implies that fear of failure weakens SPOs in aspects of leadership and decision-making. In this study, only 25% of SPOs reported positive results on this aspect.

*'My colleagues at work have been role models for me over the years. They lifted my spirits and improved my leadership skills.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'At first, it is important to get to know people. Then it is up to you to trust their knowledge and their gut.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'As an SPO, I made many mistakes over the years. I found my way up to this position by working with others who were more experienced than I was ten years ago.'* [SPO, Finance]

These views suggest that one should look for role models to rely on and work with others to avoid red flags such as corruption, misconduct and wrongdoing. This confirms what Plutarch alluded to (de Blois, 2004). Ideally, the coach's role would be to engage SPOs and senior executives in anti-corruption training programmes that lead to greater accountability within the MPS. The issues related to political corruption, nepotism and favouritism will be explored in the following subtheme.

### ***Political Corruption, Nepotism and Favouritism***

One of the biggest challenges in organisations today is creating a safe environment for employees to raise concerns about misconduct and wrongdoing.

In this study, an SPO from the finance sector complained:

*'... we have not yet reached a situation where public officials in Malta can speak their minds. We know we are surrounded by corruption, but no one is doing anything about it.'* [SPO, Finance]

Political corruption in Malta has been shown at the highest levels in public institutions. The news that the Financial Action Task Force grey-listed Malta in June 2021 (Malta Independent, 2021) shows how ineffective governance systems can be compounded due to corrupt practices by politicians and businesses. This explanation is supported by earlier evidence showing how Ms Daphne Caruana Galizia (the journalist) tried to promote change but gave her life for these failures. This is also exacerbated by the multitude of other ideological and social factions (*festa-partiti*) across the island, as confirmed by Watson (2019).

A healthcare SPO spoke of frequent changes in top positions as a government strategy to strengthen the party's position:

*'Our Prime Minister or his cabinet appoints certain people of trust. The unchecked powers of public leaders are increasing in government in order to strengthen the party's position in power.'*

This view suggests a motivation for nepotism. Corruption increases where nepotism exists (Watson, 2019). However, few studies show the extent of nepotism in the MPS, which highlights the importance of this research. The question on nepotism asked whether all senior managers within the MPS were recruited based on a specific set of high-calibre academic criteria, including professional and purely academic qualifications. The survey data shows that only 23% agree with this statement. Three SPOs from the different sectors commented:

*'This Government appoints people to take on responsibilities in very senior positions for political reasons. They do not care about us. What they care about are budgets and numbers.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'All they might want is to keep a low profile, keep earning their salary and make it to retirement.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'Our seniors do not seem to care much about our knowledge and abilities. They only consider political blood ties and friends of friends.'* [SPO, ICT]

According to 63% of SPOs, this unfairness in filling leadership positions is unethical. These respondents related unethical behaviour with corruption and favouritism (32%), friendship (30%), discrimination (22%) and self-interest (16%). The results also show that 37% of SPOs see favouritism as a *'more flexible behaviour towards people who share the same political views'*. The majority of SPOs (87%) believe that favouritism leads to a lack of motivation and morale and distrust among public officials. The researcher will elaborate on this point in the discussion chapter.

#### **4.5.2 Organisational and Management Failings (Theme 5)**

##### ***Communication and Interaction Issues***

This study reveals three fundamental issues that have led the MPS to organisational and management failures: (i) communication and interaction issues, (ii) behavioural

and trust issues, and (iii) absence of training. The three main themes are detailed in these subsections. Regardless of the communication used through different avenues, senior leaders in the MPS are not trusted. SPOs are afraid to speak to their bosses, who make them feel inferior or insignificant. Several officials alleged that senior managers are bad-tempered, overestimate themselves, and take decisions without consultation. This section concludes by presenting evidence of the lack of training within the MPS.

In the Ministry of Health, most respondents (65%) said it is extremely difficult to communicate with superiors. This was followed by the ICT and digital media sectors (25%) and the finance sector (10%). These facts do not indicate there are more communication problems in the Ministries with the higher percentages of respondents because:

- a. Not all ministries have the same number of staff. As already shown at the beginning of this chapter, there are about 12,000 staff in the health sector, 700 in the finance sector and about 1,000 in ICT.
- b. Not all ministries have the same number of staff in the scales chosen. The healthcare sector is larger and has a significant human resource capacity.

When SPOs were asked how they prefer to interact or communicate at work, the majority indicated that they prefer e-mail exchanges (47%), followed by face-to-face interaction with their colleagues (23%) as the first option, with telephone (18%) and Skype (12%) as a second option. We learn from the literature that managers who use a combination of face-to-face methods, telephone, and electronic communication with other mixed technologies are most effective when interacting with people at work (Nardone et al., 2018).

Most respondents indicated that they prefer to communicate with their superiors via e-mail, which shows an important cultural marker. Several respondents pointed out that this communication mechanism is sometimes used as a safety precaution, as senior managers cannot be trusted:

*'It is important to communicate certain things via e-mail to prove what has been done and discussed. Verbal communication is twisted or denied by superiors.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'I prefer to use emails, so I would have a copy of what we discussed, and nobody would say I did not do this or that. It is all written in black and white.'* [SPO, ICT]

Two other SPO respondents complained that their ideas were often rejected or shelved. The second respondent even talked about giving constructive criticism:

*'My superiors do not share my technical expertise. Specific suggestions are put on hold or even rejected.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'I do not find it difficult to communicate with my superiors, but I find that ideas and constructive criticism are not welcomed or encouraged, especially if they think these are not in line with their management ideology.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

Another four respondents mentioned that only top-down communication mechanisms exist in their respective sectors because *'bottom-up channels do not work.'* In contrast, one respondent mentioned that the communication situation has improved since the new assistant director replaced the retired director, whose communication skills were *'abysmal.'*

Another SPO described a very unpleasant situation in his department where:

*'Recently, communication with seniors has decreased. Regular meetings do not take place, and emails are never acknowledged and rarely answered. Many SPOs do not want to have one-on-one meetings because they are afraid of getting into trouble.'* [SPO, Finance]

The following respondent indicated that she is pleased to have been relocated from her unit due to poor communication experience in her previous job:

*'As an employee in my [current unit], I feel fortunate that I can say whatever I want. I struggled with many issues in the past with my previous superiors within [the same Ministry]. I was not even allowed to speak.'* [SPO, Finance]

These views show that public officials of different ranks lack communication skills. Effective communication pertains to how well managers and leaders communicate with one another. Coaching can be one of the obvious ways to improve communication within sectors.

### ***Behaviour and Trust Issues***

The origin of trust lies in the condition of empathic understanding, which is associated with the person-centred (PC) approach established by Carl Rogers, who states that ‘trust is an essential ingredient of a relationship’ (Katz & Keyes, 2020). Similarly, Akhbari and Hadders-Algra (2020) argue that relationships depend heavily on ‘trust’, cultivated through ‘transparency’.

Some other authors (Middour-Oxler et al., 2022; Shahmalak et al., 2019) suggest that a suitable level of trust is usually set up before coaching begins. We need to consider three aspects of trust in a coaching relationship: trust in oneself, the coach, and the process. Employees who experience a lack of trust often feel powerless due to the power dynamics in the workplace. This study highlights the lack of trust between leaders and followers in the MPS and the resulting challenges for developing an awareness of the importance of trust in building positive relationships. As we shall see in the following paragraphs, findings show an increased level of frustration, anger and envy amongst public officials.

According to 80% of SPOs, their seniors ‘*impose*’ and are ‘*naïve in accepting apologies*’; ‘*they are bad-tempered*’, ‘*demanding*’ and ‘*too proud*’. The findings show that leaders who build trust through open and participative approaches may be more likely to succeed than those with a dictatorial style.

One SPO respondent said:

*'When we ask for advice or help, they react aggressively and tell us to stop bothering them.'* [SPO, Finance]

Another respondent claimed that the occasional arguments between superiors demotivate SPOs:

*'It is not nice to hear them scream.... conflicts should remain confidential, as they negatively affect the motivation of lower scales.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

Several SPOs know that their bosses gossip and fail to keep promises. When things are unplanned, respondents (73%) said their seniors react harshly. For one respondent, this was not the first time his seniors had mocked him in front of his peers:

*'I know they talk behind our backs and make promises they do not keep. When things do not go the way they want, they use a harsh tone of voice. There were instances where I have been insulted by seniors in front of my colleagues and was told that if I did not like it, I could pack my things and leave'* [SPO, Healthcare]

This response vividly illustrates how public leaders use rumours instead of cultivating cultural development. Rumours would create undesirable behaviours due to situational and organisational factors, such as exclusion, injustice in OC, free-riding behaviour in the team, and loss of trust (Urquhart & Zhang, 2022).

The data yielded by this study suggests that senior managers look down on others, and since they have trained people in various departments and ministries, they consider themselves good coaches. The higher the level of leadership, the more powerful they feel, as the following quotes show:

*'Our bosses have so much power that it can be difficult to keep track of what is going on around us. These people think they know everything and that their way is the only way to get things done.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'As managers rise to higher positions, they act like they know everything and look upon others.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'Things are considerably better now that my boss has retired. I used to figure out how to handle difficult tasks on my own. I used to cry every time I left his office.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

The statements above show that senior managers within MPS are embracing a traditional management style and a boss-centric culture. According to two Finance SPOs, government strategies are rarely communicated to a public official of a lower rank.

*'I asked my superior if we should work together on a particular project in one of our wards. She answered: "You can work on that personally; it is not my business."'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'I once worked in a research department, and in my first week as an SPO, I was told by the Director-General: "You were promoted to give me answers, not to ask me questions!'* [SPO, Finance]

The above comments are more of an administrative problem than a coaching or mentoring issue. On a different note, it was encouraging to see from the following statements that six SPOs from the ICT and digital media sector perceived a culture of trust in their work environment compared to the other two sectors:

*'Our roles as SPOs depend on whom we trust and how mutual relationships are built. Trust is an essential ingredient. If we want to excel in leadership, we have to trust our own people.'* [SPO, ICT]

*'The relationship with my superior was initially quite good, and after a few weeks of working together, it got even better. The most important thing in this relationship is to get to know each other first, then build trust and develop rapport.'* [SPO, ICT]

*'Sometimes, when you have personal issues, you need to talk to someone you can trust, and my superior is always there for me, and he is not judgemental. He understands me,*

*trusts me, and we have a good relationship with each other. If I make mistakes, that's okay because he wants me to learn from them.* ' [SPO, ICT]

*'If people believe you are on their side, they will trust you no matter what. Having someone who is not just your boss but a trusted friend who takes care of you personally and professionally is the most valuable thing.'* [SPO, ICT]

*'In the beginning, I did not know my superior. However, once I realised that she was genuinely interested in my professional development and growth, I trusted her and became loyal to her.'* [SPO, ICT]

*'The independence and freedom I have in my work motivate me. I work alone most of the time, without my boss's supervision. She trusts me and likes the fact that I can work independently with minimal supervision.'* [SPO, ICT]

### ***Absence of Training***

The Institute for Public Service in Malta (IPS) resorts to the services available on the open market. The coaches outside the public service are well-informed and can contribute the latest ideas. Nevertheless, this study suggests that the MPS does not offer coaching programmes for SPOs; instead, a senior management toolkit is organised and delivered by the same institute before or after managerial appointments. This class-based programme includes modules related to the administrative aspects of the MPS. Seniors who form part of the Higher Executive Service (HES) are exempt from this programme for no reason.

The programme is technical, and the modular topics are not always relevant to the participants. After completing this programme, there are no further development programmes for SPOs, unless they take an independent course or have an independent coach focused on their professional development. The toolkit offered by Institute for the Public Service (IPS) does not meet their basic needs, and sometimes SPOs are left alone wondering what to do next. An ICT SPO said: *'... once the toolkit is done, you are on your own. You would not know where to go or what to do next unless you are instructed to do something specific.'*

In this study, SPOs were asked if they were prepared for their coaching roles within the MPS. These SPOs are experienced in their roles. Most SPOs with leadership experience (79%) indicated that they had taken part in CPD activities, whereas only 21% of SPOs who reported having acquired coaching and leadership skills were self-taught or learnt on the job. This low percentage indicates that very few SPOs are getting the guidance they need in the workplace. According to these SPOs, some learnt skills were related to the workplace context, such as developing listening skills, receiving and giving feedback, etc. The same respondents related the learnt leadership aspects to professional alliances and relationships – modules also covered in the senior management toolkit. 87% of SPOs believe that senior managers should allocate a separate budget for CPD activities to support leadership development within the MPS. This allows employees to increase their knowledge and skills through conferences or online training courses, which can help them achieve new heights in their careers.

#### **4.6 RESEARCH QUESTION 3**

**‘What views do Maltese SPOs have about coaching as a form of professional development?’**

##### **4.6.1 Exploration of the Purposes of Coaching in the Maltese Setting (Theme 6)**

This section presents the findings related to objectives 2 and 3. The scope is to understand the distinct types of coaching that already exist within the MPS and how Maltese practitioners perceive coaching in general. This section is divided into four main subthemes, namely, (i) confusion about the nature and practice of coaching, (ii) coaching practices within MPS, (iii) coaching and mentoring barriers, and (iv) coaching relationships.

The overall results of this study suggest there is much confusion about what coaching is and what it can offer to the MPS. These findings are like those of Grant and Green (2018) and Wahyuningsih and Sartika (2020). The study suggests that around one-third of respondents see coaching as *‘a developing concept.’* This is consistent with the works of Tsui et al. (2017) and Martino (2019), who also regard coaching as a form of professional development. The other third of SPOs agree that *‘the power of*

*coaching is clear*’ and consider it *‘as mature as each coach.’* The remaining 40% of respondents see coaching as *‘a way of teaching and learning’*. Other statements from the study refer to similar roles attributed under the misnomer of ‘coaching’, with further remarks stating that coaching in Malta *‘... is in its infancy and suffers from a lack of clear standards’*; *‘It is still at an early and at a conceptual phase’*, *‘... has not taken hold as a term’*, and *‘... needs to be actively promoted’*. The study also reveals that 79% of SPOs take private coaching.

### ***Confusion About the Nature and Practice of Coaching***

We learn from the literature that coaching is not always defined consistently. This diversity has confused researchers about the nature of coaching and its boundaries. For example, we find that the literature often uses coaching and training interchangeably. This is confirmed by authors such as Steffen (2021), who argues that the term ‘coaching’ is often masked by ‘training’. Coaching can be the wrong intervention to use, and employees need either training or mentoring; as mentioned in the literature, sometimes counselling or consultancy (Graßmann et al., 2020; Hermel-Stănescu & Svasta, 2014).

As described in the introductory chapter, a mix of coaching and combined approaches are used in Malta, alongside the forms of training already used in social work (Cap. 468, Laws of Malta, MJCL, 2018b) and psychology (Cap. 471, Laws of Malta, MJCL, 2018c), where much supervision is needed. In this study, this researcher explored the key words that ICIs use to define the sense of coaching; content analysis of answers identified 21 such words. The frequency of words was computed via SQL query to identify key words from definitions of coaching provided by ICIs. The most frequently used word was ‘development’ (Figure 13 illustrates the results graphically). According to ICIs, development characteristics are a key feature of coaching, followed by other vital components. Coaching has also been expressed in terms of teaching and support that help people grow.

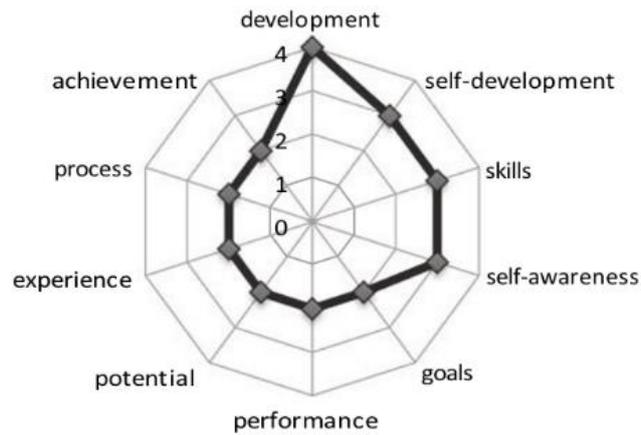


Figure 13: Frequency of Key Words Used by ICIs

In this study, we asked SPOs what they thought about coaching and what types of coaching they provide in their respective sectors, which will be explored in the next subtheme.

### *Coaching Practices Within MPS*

Content analysis of coaching definitions reveals the key words used by SPOs to describe the aims of coaching. In the analysis, coaching was projected as a process used to improve, develop, resolve conflicts and strengthen relationships (Figure 14).

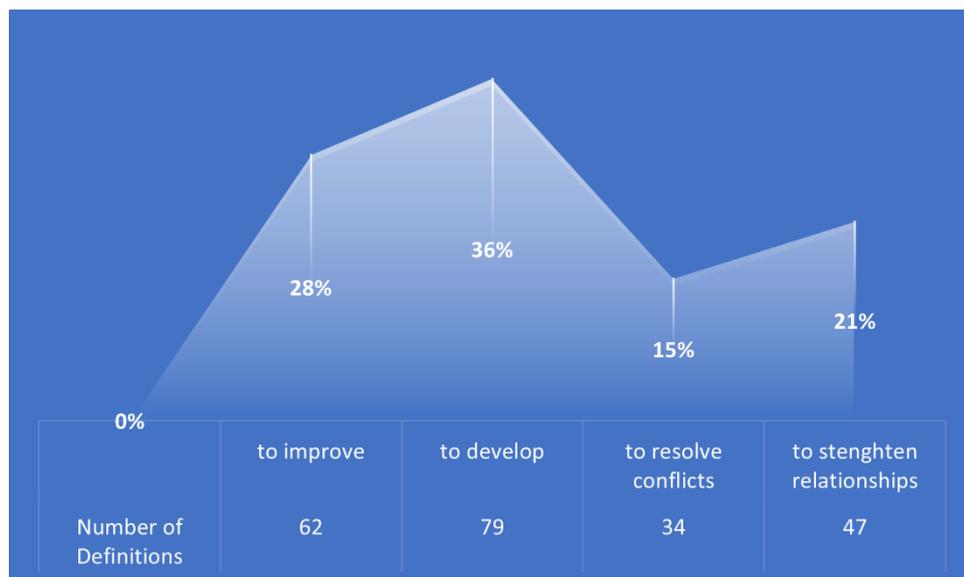


Figure 14: Analysis of the Aims of Coaching

The surprising aspect of this survey lies in the statistics (Figure 15): 58% of those surveyed consider ‘telling’ to be more effective than ‘coaching’. In a ‘telling culture,’ the assumption is that the manager knows the answer and achieves the change. In a coaching culture, it is assumed that employees can find the solution and even have a better approach (Van Wart 2019).



Figure 15: Preferences between Telling and Coaching

The above statistics must be interpreted with caution, as the current practices of the MPS oppose Wilson’s (2012) philosophical coaching principles; these are based on self-directed learning, while MPS’s work practices use a directive approach. Alabdali (2020) suggests that managers who tell rather than coach waste their energy and make it more difficult for subordinates to accept new insights, thereby increasing resistance.

Coaching encompasses different approaches, styles, and techniques in which one person helps another (or several others) to learn and develop. This perspective has a specific goal, such as to improve individual performance, refine skills, or help the coached person navigate and then make decisions (Connor & Pokora, 2017; Cox et al., 2014). Some survey respondents expressed the view that coaching is a ‘*much-needed tool*’ in Malta but ‘*has not yet been accepted*’ by Maltese practitioners. A respondent from the ICT and digital media sector remarked:

*'When interacting with managers from different backgrounds, we must take into account the foreign cultures that are being adapted to our country. Since Malta joined the EU, we have become a multicultural community. So, we should think about combining perspectives from foreign cultures and fusing them with our traditional trends and practices.'* [SPO, ICT]

Looking more closely at the SPOs data, 79% suggest that workplace coaching offers significant value for money in job-coach training. Prior to this research, it was unclear whether SPOs were practising coaching within MPS, although it was certain that experienced SPOs participated in private coaching and CPD activities. The data from this study (Table 21) shows that private coaching has (to some extent) helped SPOs to recognise themselves and their environment, apply new methods, solve problems, and make relationships more effective. According to these SPOs, private coaching has been crucial for them, as they have improved their performance and now feel they can see their goals much more clearly.

Table 21: Private Coaching Experience

<b>SPOs, Healthcare Sector</b>	<b>SPOs, Finance Sector</b>	<b>SPOs, ICT &amp; Digital Media Sector</b>
<i>'I have learnt new techniques that I can use in my daily life.'</i>	<i>'I believe coaching has helped me become more aware of myself, my surroundings, my colleagues, etc.'</i>	<i>'Coaching enabled me to step back and think more clearly.'</i>
<i>'Coaching has not only increased my understanding of some work-related challenges but also positively changed my personal thinking.'</i>	<i>'Coaching included communication skills, self-focus, bringing case studies to life and generating ideas to solve problems.'</i>	<i>'Has provided me with the information I need to put conflict management principles into practice.'</i>
<i>'Great workshops for introspection, self-exploration and engagement.'</i>	<i>'Coaching was done to help me improve my work. Even though I will be retiring shortly, as an SPO, I am ready to make the necessary changes.'</i>	<i>'Coaching was quite informative. I can apply what I have learnt in the workplace.'</i>
<i>'I found coaching fascinating and an effective way to interact with my colleagues.'</i>	<i>'I felt more like a participant rather than a spectator. I was impressed by the organisers. Overall, it was fun!'</i>	<i>'It made me more aware of things I had previously overlooked.'</i>

The above statements outlined in the table above were analysed and decoded into six dominant key factors (Figure 16) to represent the main coaching benefits and the impact of private coaching on experienced public officials.

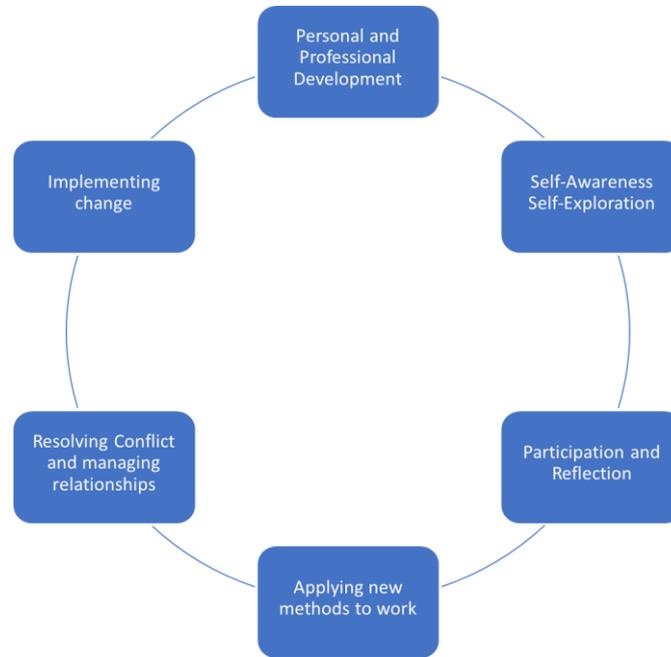


Figure 16: Coaching Benefits

Table 22 below presents the results for the manifestation of private coaching benefits identified by SPOs. Broadly speaking, variables are highly manifested, as shown in the overall weighted mean of 3.98.

Table 22: Summary of the Degree of Manifestation of Private Coaching

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Rating</b>
Personal and Professional Development	4.10	Highly Manifested
Self-Awareness, Self-Exploration	3.99	Highly Manifested
Participation and Reflection	3.98	Highly Manifested
Applying new methods to work	3.96	Highly Manifested
Resolving conflict and managing relationships	3.94	Highly Manifested
Implementing change	3.93	Highly Manifested
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.98</b>	<b>Highly Manifested</b>

More precisely, the determinants with the highest mean scale values are personal and professional development (4.10); self-awareness and self-exploration (3.99); participation and reflection (3.98); applying new methods to work (3.96); resolving conflict and managing relationships (3.94). On the other hand, the indicator with the least manifestation but still rated as highly manifested is implementing change, with a mean scale value of 3.93.

SPOs were also asked if they coach others in MPS. In response to this question, 65% of SPOs indicated that they offer coaching in the workplace, while 35% answered in the negative. This implies there is a culture of coaching within the MPS, but it is carried out *ad hoc*, using combined approaches without being aware of them. These SPOs coach Principals and Senior Principals (junior management / first-line managers) below scale 7. Those who answered in the affirmative were asked to indicate what type of coaching they had received already and what they thought they might receive in the future. As mentioned, prior to this research, it was unclear whether SPOs were practising coaching within MPS, but now we might have a clearer picture. The questionnaire described some coaching terms (as outlined below) to ensure that respondents understood the terminology used in coaching contexts.

‘Please select the types of coaching you received in the last 12 months (Please select and rank from the list below).’

- Coaching for Skills: Purpose is to learn or improve specific skills (which can include interpersonal skills): Typically focuses on a specific task or project; typically, a shorter-term engagement.
- Coaching for Performance: Focuses on the client’s present job; the purpose is to function more effectively at work or to address a performance issue; typically, a slightly longer engagement (several months).
- Coaching for Development: Focuses on the client’s future job; purpose is to heighten certain skills or change others, encourage long-term development to advance their career; often for high potentials, typically longer than several months (a year or more).
- Coaching for the Executive’s Agenda: Typically done with higher-level executives; focuses on providing outsider insight and perspective, constructive feedback (which is often hard to get at higher levels) and a talking partner; time frame varies, but often ‘on-call’ for the executive.

As shown in [Figure 17](#), 58% of SPOs from ICT and digital media indicated coaching for skills as their first preference, followed by 42% of SPOs from the healthcare sector and 13% from finance. According to some scholars (Connor & Pakora, 2017; Cox et al., 2014), coaching for skills related to organisational needs can be achieved by designing tailored coaching programmes.

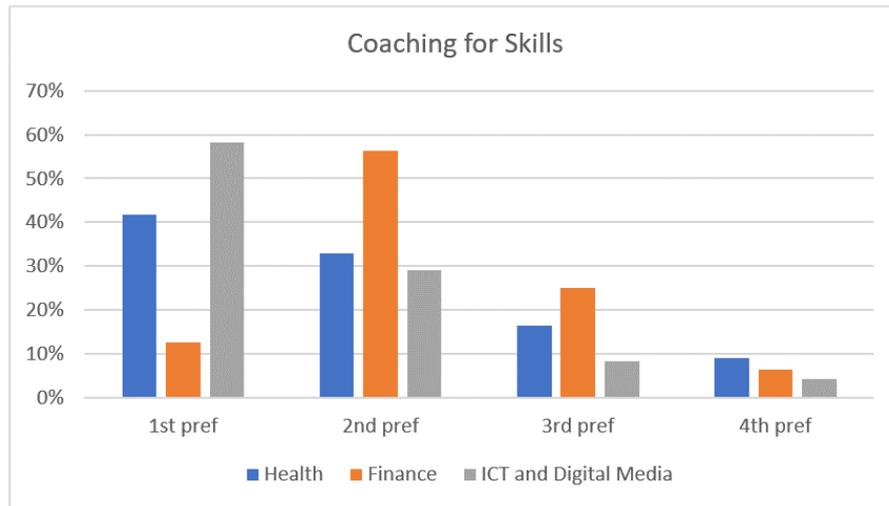


Figure 17: Coaching for Skills

As shown in [Figure 18](#), 31% of SPOs in healthcare indicated coaching for performance as their first choice, compared to 30% of SPOs in finance and 25% in ICT and digital media. Coaching for performance aims to improve the individual’s performance at work. Coaching varies depending on the situation, but the goal is always to increase employee effectiveness and productivity (Connor & Pakora 2017; Hawkins & Smith 2014).

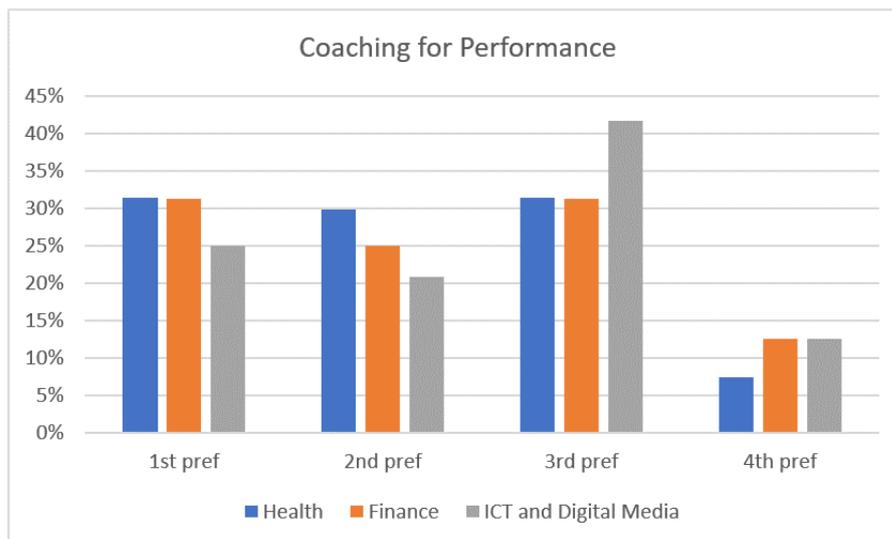


Figure 18: Coaching for Performance

Figure 19 below shows that 44% of SPOs from the finance sector prefer coaching for their development. Respondents from the healthcare, ICT and digital media sectors showed the lowest preference for this type of coaching, with only 9% and 8%, respectively.

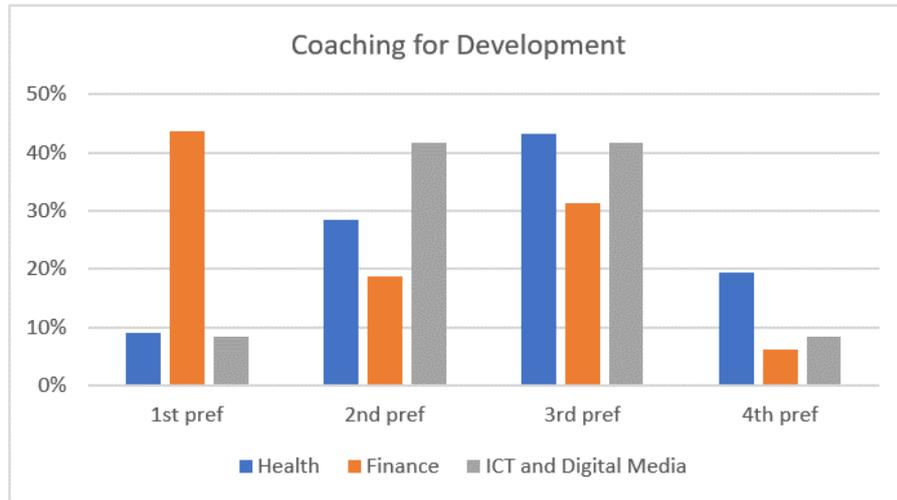


Figure 19: Coaching for Development

Next, Figure 20 shows that 18% of healthcare SPOs indicated coaching for the executive agenda as their top priority. This was followed by 13% of SPOs from the finance sector and 9% from ICT and digital media. This result relates only to the percentage of respondents aspiring for a leadership position.

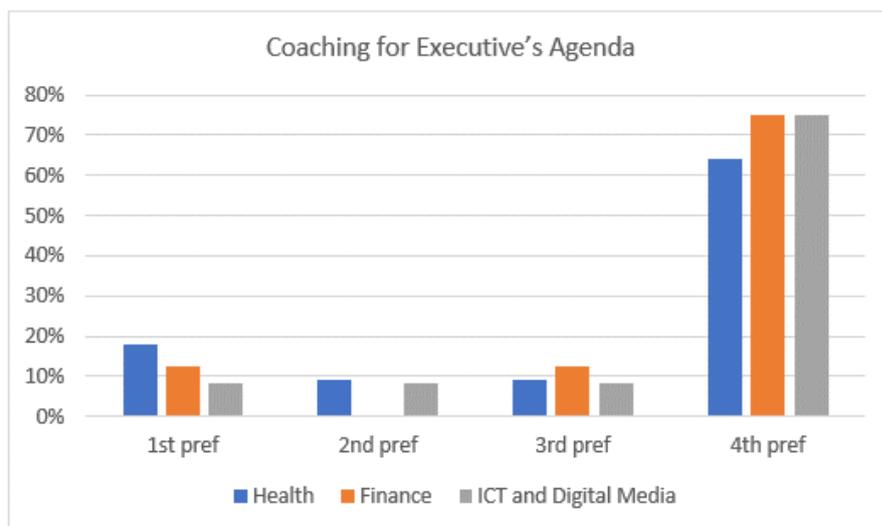


Figure 20: Coaching for an Executive's Agenda

SPOs' data shows that the preferred age group for coaching was between 41 and 50 years old. Men had a higher preference than women for coaching for skills in the ICT and healthcare sectors, while women had a higher preference for coaching for performance in the healthcare and finance sectors. The mapping data above (Figures 17 to 20) have been summarised in [Table 23](#) below to effectively show each combination's options.

Table 23: Coaching Preferences

Coaching Preferences	Health	Finance	ICT
Coaching for Skills	42%	13%	58%
Coaching for Performance	31%	30%	25%
Coaching for Development	9%	44%	8%
Coaching for an Executive's Agenda	18%	13%	9%

A closer look at the data reveals that SPOs across all sectors emphasise skills and performance more than development and leadership agendas. This means that SPOs want to move from a 'command-and-control' mentality to a more positive, humanistic and motivating leadership style. Faced with rapid, disruptive change, command-and-control leadership is no longer practical, and managers cannot be expected to have the answer for everything. Many organisations worldwide use coaching to facilitate and solve problems and to promote employee development by asking critical questions. Instead of giving orders and making judgements, they offer as much support and guidance as possible (Grant, 2017; Matsuo et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the study data ([Figure 21](#)) shows that 62% of SPOs agreed with the statement that '*executive coaching is a tool for engaging managers*'. However, earlier findings in this study show that executive coaching was the least preferred coaching style among the SPOs from the research sample. This provides some evidence that executive coaching in Malta does not receive strong support, although this should not necessarily be extrapolated to the broader population.

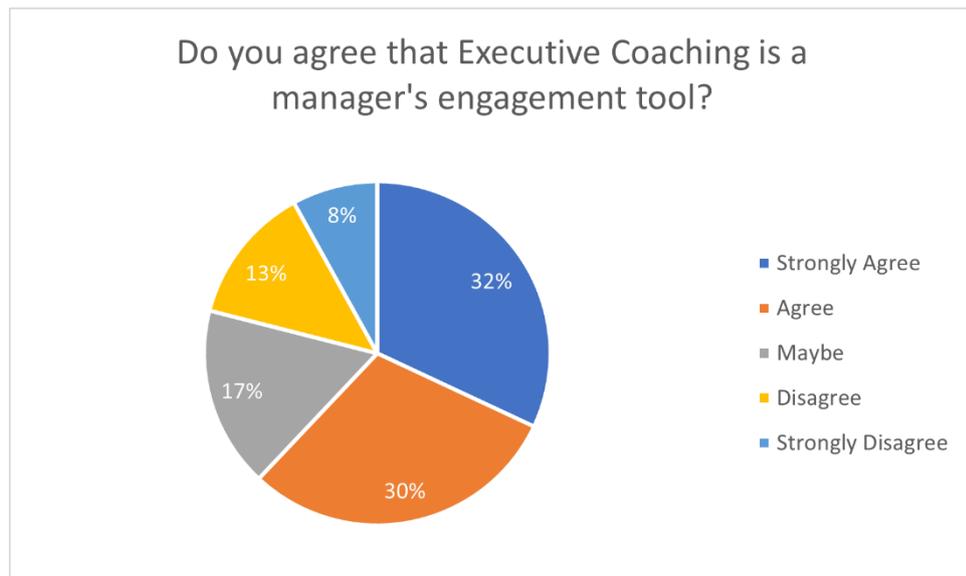


Figure 21: Executive Coaching as a Manager's Engagement Tool

Despite the many positive benefits expected from coaching, evaluating its effectiveness can be challenging. Coaching results take time to emerge; they vary from one coaching intervention to the next and are often difficult to evaluate. In this study, only half of the survey respondents confirmed that they carry out evaluations in their respective sectors. Evaluations are practical tools for SP, and coaching can benefit directly from SP processes. SP guarantees the continued existence of organisations, which depends on the right people being in the right place at the right time. SP also helps managers evaluate candidates for leadership positions and recruit them for promotion to higher positions (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2020).

While healthcare (42%) and ICT SPOs (39%) rated SP as good to excellent, finance SPOs rated SP as satisfactory. The following two SPOs elaborated on their views:

*'We are looking for candidates with unique leadership qualities, especially now as we try to adapt to new technological systems in the hospital that did not exist before.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'We have seniors who are close to retirement. It is about time we thought about their successors without potentially risking or losing potential leaders to go elsewhere.'* [SPO, ICT]

In this study, SPOs were asked to select five options from a provided list of attributes that classify an individual as coachable. The list was theory-based and drawn from the literature (Lopez, 2017; Minzlaff, 2019). According to survey respondents (Figure 22), the preferred options were: (i) communication skills (17%); (ii) active engagement (16%); (iii) clear goals (14%) and commitment (14%); (iv) willingness to change (13%); (v) emotional intelligence (12%); ambition (7%); a sense of psychological safety (4%); and courage (3%).

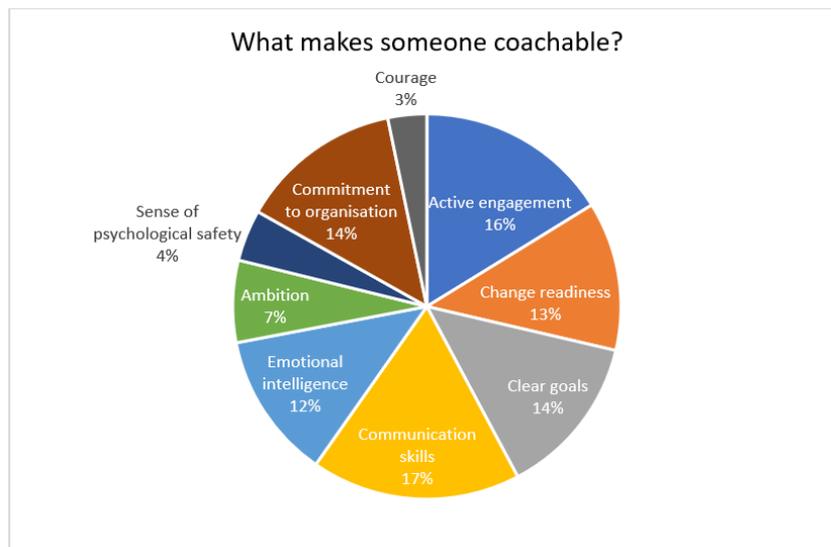


Figure 22: What Makes Someone Coachable?

According to this study, communication skills (17%) and active engagement (16%) were the highest rated, while active engagement, clear goals, commitment, willingness to change and emotional intelligence were not far behind. The ‘ambition’ factor was considered less important for coaching. Such an answer raises the question of whether SPOs are coached for leadership positions. Notable studies (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Grant, 2017) suggest examining how managers/leaders can become effective coaches. Coach participants in this study had stimulated debate and described a good coach as having good business knowledge and deep insight into the operations. The following three ICIs complemented these views by saying:

*'... I think the best quality of a good coach is to have good business acumen... This helps us better understand the company's objectives, culture and working context... This knowledge allows us to better interact with leaders.'* [ICI 8]

*'Coaches should have a deep insight into the organisation... This helps increase engagement and provide the direction needed for productivity and job performance.'* [ICI 9]

*'... coaches need to know how the organisation works and how research is conducted. This makes it easier to determine what type of training needs to be conducted.'* [ICI 15]

This researcher was also interested in examining respondents' views on executive coaching, as this coaching genre is closely related to leadership development (Day et al., 2017; de Haan, 2019). In the previous section, the researcher noted that this type of coaching was the least preferred approach by SPOs, mainly because it was the least understood. In response to the question: 'What are your views about Executive Coaching Practice in Malta?' several responses were elicited:

*'Good start but still a long way to go.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'Applies to certain areas, but not all professions.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'Not sure about executive coaching in Malta, but I think it is not being given enough attention.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'I am not aware of any official profession in this field. I know people who offer executive coaching, but I am unsure if it is a recognised profession in Malta.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'It is essential and required in certain areas of the public service.'* [SPO, ICT]

*'I need to know more about it.'* [SPO, ICT]

An optimistic view came from a 58-year-old who is professionally qualified for his role and has participated in private coaching. Within the MPS, he holds a leading position in the healthcare sector. He aptly defined the role of executive coaching as follows:

*'An executive coach is a qualified practitioner who works with senior executives to help them gain self-knowledge, unleash their potential to develop their leadership skills while serving as a sounding-board member.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

While there was scepticism about whether executive coaching would gain a foothold in the MPS or outside the public service, 43% of SPOs see executive coaching as a type of investment that promises a return:

*'Malta would benefit from executive coaching with all its evidence-based benefits, cost-effectiveness and positive outcomes.'* [SPO, Finance]

*'Executive coaching, as a profession, is a valuable tool for the organisation. It will help qualified employees assigned to specific tasks to save money spent on wasted time and learning procedures.'* [SPO, ICT]

These views contrast with the findings of Fillery-Travis and Lane (2020), who contend that return on investment (ROI) may not capture what is learnt and what works well in the coaching dynamic. The following comments came from more experienced SPOs with 20 to 25 years of leadership experience:

*'The main benefits of hiring executive coaches are that they help leaders question their surroundings. They help to bring clarity to the decision-making process and provide sufficient and valuable resources.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'Hiring an executive coach is important to achieve higher organisational scores.'* [SPO, Finance].

Another finance sector respondent commented:

*'If the Central Government were considering using external coaches, we would expect them to clarify goals and come up with solutions for us.'*

While some respondents from the finance sector see executive coaching as an activity not part of their work culture and are not currently perceived as a need, other SPOs from other sectors said, *'organisations need to recognise it'* and that it requires a *'cultural shift'* and a *'change in the mindset'* for executive coaching to *'gain*

*momentum*’ in Malta. Those at higher levels do not share the opinions of many in the community. The lack of consensus on how to proceed is an unsatisfactory state of affairs, and it will likely remain this way until someone steps up to take charge.

### ***Coaching and Mentoring Barriers***

This subsection focuses on coaching and mentoring barriers and whether overcoming specific barriers affects coaching effectiveness. The literature (Garvey et al., 2017; Turner & Palmer, 2018) focuses on ‘successful’ coaching relationships, but little is known about the barriers to successful coaching. One explanation for the lack of focus on barriers is that coaching leaders may not see it as a problem. In this study, SPOs were asked to indicate, from a provided list, the barriers they face in their organisation with coaching/mentoring. SPOs had the option to select more than one choice in their response. As shown in [Figure 23](#) below, 77% of respondents indicated that lack of time and resources seems to be a problem, followed by 54% citing OC as the barrier.

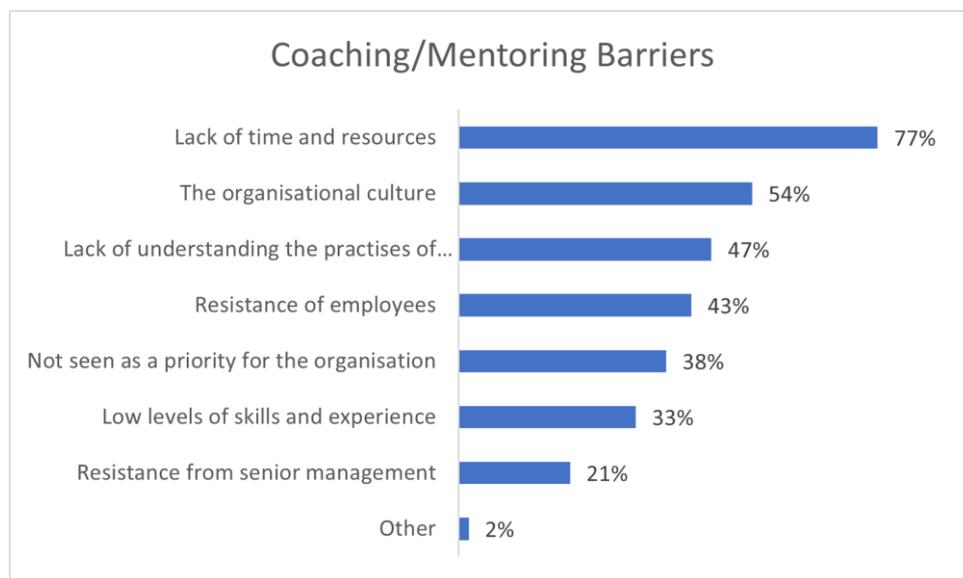


Figure 23: Coaching/Mentoring Barriers

From the statistics above, 47% of SPOs show a lack of understanding of coaching practices. The least cited coaching barrier was resistance from senior management, but a higher percentage of SPOs selected employee resistance as a coaching barrier. This suggests that employees are more resistant to coaching than senior managers, which provides a unique perspective on issues regarding OC within the MPS.

When SPOs were asked about the critical factors needed to develop a coaching/mentoring culture within sectors, 69% of respondents suggested ‘*addressing resistance to change*’, ‘*aligning policies and procedures*’, and ‘*developing internal coaches*’. Others broadened their views and mentioned ‘*increasing leadership capacity/cadre*’ in the three main sectors (healthcare, finance, ICT, and digital media).

### ***Coaching Relationships***

This study asked SPOs who would initiate the coaching relationship in their respective areas. They had four options to choose from and could state more options if they had any. Figure 24 below shows that 44% of SPOs chose the ‘Manager of the coachee’ as their first option; 30% chose ‘Colleagues’, 22% ‘Human Resources’, and 4% ‘Other’.

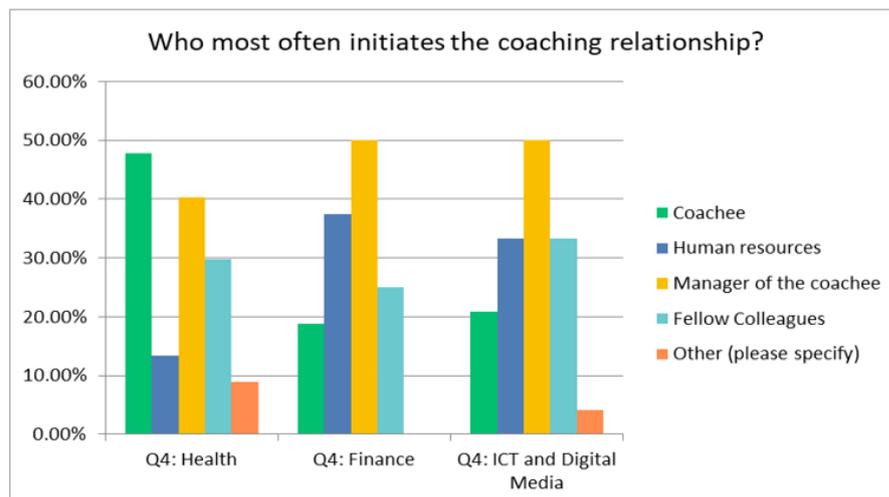


Figure 24: Initiating the Coaching Relationship

Coaching relationships have their origins in psychotherapy research (Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2021). Previous studies have shown that the coaching relationship (or working alliance) is a primary factor, facilitator, or moderator of coaching outcomes (de Haan, 2019). When coding SPOs data, three features emerged that classify a coaching relationship within the MPS, namely: (i) trust, (ii) friendship, and (iii) confidence.

Two SPOs expanded their views on these three fundamental elements:

*'We feel comfortable enough to work with our seniors on performance issues. Our relationships are based on friendship and trust. If you do not have these qualities, no relationship can work.'* [SPO, Healthcare]

*'Relationships with our seniors are critical as we speak with more confidence and trust.'* [SPO, Finance]

Because leaders have roles and responsibilities that require trust, they need clear, transparent and accountable decision-making processes. According to some authors (Kibui, 2015; Kohestany & Yaghoubi, 2017), transparent leaders in decision-making create a fair work environment where subordinates can serve as role models.

During interviews with coaches, a coaching relationship has been defined as *'an approach where all parties involved in the process communicate openly, specify needs and then make practical decisions based on that experience.'* These elements follow earlier writings showing that a coach who treats coachees warmly, empathetically and without prejudice shows practical leadership qualities (Grant & Green, 2018). The minority of ICIs said that the coach's role is not to uncover the problem but to question how workable solutions could be transferred to the workplace. Typical comments from participants were:

*'Coaching is what we always do – a conversation in which coaches skilfully ask questions, speak their mind, express their opinion, get to the heart of the problem, consider the clients' different perspectives, gain insights and formulate insightful answers.'* [ICI 1]

*'It must be relevant and transferable to the workplace.'* [ICI 2]

*'I work for both the public and private sectors and have high-profile clients requiring my coaching services. I work with them on several occasions to change attitudes and behaviour. I coordinate results and expectations with them. However, one must be confident and trust the process. When my clients see the value of the preparations involved*

*and the potential outcome, we sign the contract and begin enrolment as planned.*’ [ICI 15]

A question was posed to ICIs about the determinants needed to strengthen coaching relationships. Typical responses were that ‘... *it depends on the quality of the coach,*’ ‘... *the reason coaching was introduced in the first place,*’ and ‘*the purpose of the coaching.*’ The findings also provided divergent views, which are shown in the comments below:

*‘... the concept of a coaching relationship is one of working together and sharing the growth achieved... It is never a makeover, and it is formulated in such a way that a person can accept more feedback to improve their performance.’* [ICI 8]

*‘Many leaders fail because they do not build relationships... Coaching relationships encourage individuals to work together and create a comfortable team environment. Fostering relationships is what great coaches do.’* [ICI 13]

Seven quality characteristics emerged from the coaching data which form the fundamental elements of a successful relationship between coach and client: (i) collaboration, (ii) open communication, (iii) co-operation, (iv) identifying needs, (v) making effective decisions, (vi) sharing experiences, and (vii) feedback. The correlation between the coaches’ and SPOs’ data reveals two common features: (i) communication and (ii) feedback. This implies that coaching is a communication mode for those willing to coach and be coached in return (Cheesebrough et al., 2020).

#### **4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has summarised the results obtained at various stages of the research. The study aimed to determine whether coaching could be used as a professional learning opportunity (amongst other active forms of PD) to help reduce the significant gap in skills within the MPS. The scope was to support the CGM in addressing the skills gap in the MPS, following the EC reports for Malta in 2017 and 2018.

This study confirms a recent shortage of skills in the healthcare, finance, ICT and digital media sectors. The Maltese skills gap identified in this study was primarily related to management issues and development opportunities, along with other issues that indirectly affect the skills gap: corruption, favouritism and nepotism. The study shows that SPOs feel they are overworked and exhausted. Their roles and responsibilities seem to depend on the Ministry's intervention in the Department's day-to-day operations. The lack of further professional development for SPOs is a major concern. No other programs are available after completing the Senior Management Toolkit course, which means that they will be unable to grow in their careers and develop new skills with time passing by, serially doing similar tasks every day.

Just over half of SPOs found direct management approaches more effective than coaching, although some respondents indicated that they offer some coaching at the workplace. SPOs are still influenced by the traditional leadership style - a 'boss-centric culture' where SPOs are expected to solve problems and tell people what to do. This case reveals a lack of trust in sectors and bullying and mismanagement by seniors towards SPOs. There have been allegations that senior managers are bad-tempered, overestimate themselves, and take decisions without consulting SPOs. The lack of access to senior leaders calls for further research to determine their perspective on the gaps.

Besides the fact that most employees are more resistant to coaching than senior managers, other barriers identified in the study include lack of time and resources and OC. SPOs defined coachability as having good communication skills, active engagement, clear goals and commitment, willingness to change, and emotional intelligence. On the other hand, the survey data suggested that effective workplace relationships are based on trust, friendship and confidence; coaching data indicates these competencies include collaboration, open communication, co-operation, needs assessment, effective decisions, sharing experiences, and providing feedback. Based on the results, there seems to be a strong connection between goal-setting and critical thinking.

The multi-level coaching model for the MPS in [Figure 25](#) below includes high-quality professional development for public officials, follow-up supervisory coaching, and workers' side-by-side coaching for individuals who need extra support. As the model indicates, the management and leadership in the MPS rely on data from the public officials' performance when supporting the employees' movement across the three levels of coaching support.

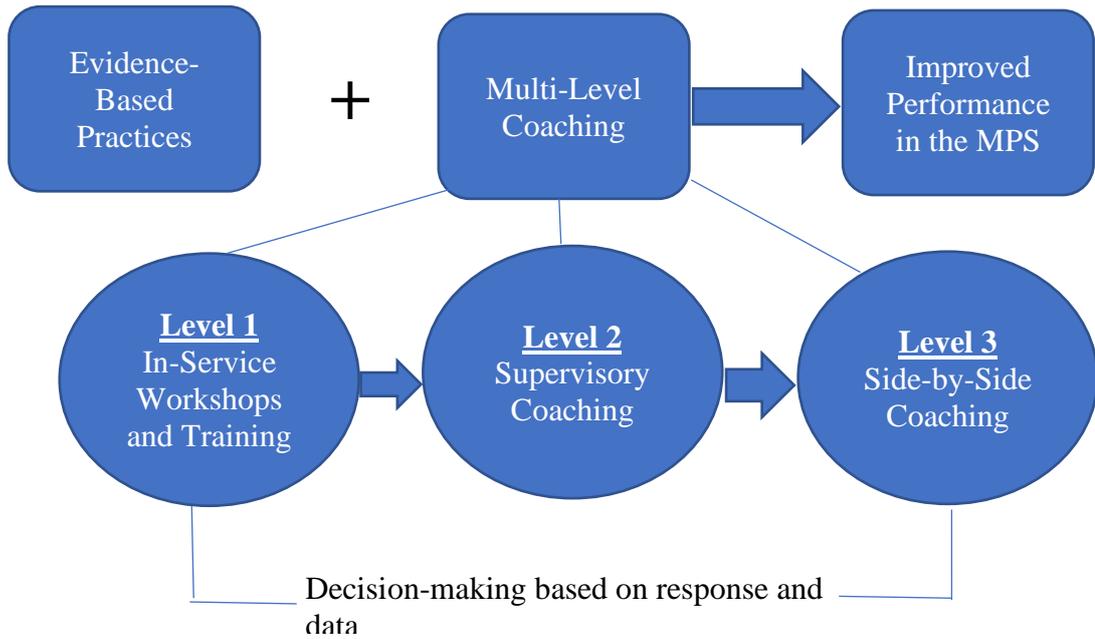


Figure 25: Multi-Level Coaching Model for the Maltese Public Service

# Chapter 5: Discussion

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*All you need is the plan, the road map,  
and the courage to press on to your destination.*

—Earl Nightingale

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into seven sections. Section 5.1 is the introduction to the chapter, followed by an outline of the study outcome (5.2). This section incorporates a model with dimensions the researcher has developed as a contribution to practice (p.190). Section 5.3 introduces the six main themes to be discussed in the following subsequent section covering the six main themes and subthemes that emerged from the findings chapter in response to research question 1 (5.4), research question 2 (5.5) and research question 3 (5.6); whether coaching can help reduce the significant skills gaps in the Maltese Public Service (MPS). This chapter concludes with a chapter summary in section 5.7.

## 5.2 STUDY OUTCOME

The study provides new insights into how coaching can help public officials and leaders better understand what is expected of them and transform their work into a larger vision or strategy for the Maltese Central Government. Both leadership (Sun & Shang, 2019) and the coaching literature (Mollman & Candela, 2018) indicate that transformative leadership could strengthen broader strategic skills amongst individuals to improve collaboration across different divisions within modern organisations.

Mac McIntire (2010), in his article ‘How to Develop Competent Managers’, acknowledges that some of those called ‘managers’ are effective in their intended role, while others are primarily concerned with receiving the required performance-related

pay but have few managerial responsibilities, tasks or jobs (Sim & Lee, 2018; Webb, 2020).

This study reconfirms the European Commission (EC) reports for Malta in 2017 and 2018, which found significant gaps in leadership skills among managerial positions. This new evidence seems to align with research conducted by Maltese scholars (Dimech, 2008; Ganado, 2017a, b; Glenn, 2012; Micallef, 2017), all pointing towards the lack of qualifications and competencies among those who hold managerial leadership positions. Other Maltese scholars have widely emphasised this issue (Cauchi, 2012; Tabone & Spiteri Gingell, 2013; Vella Scicluna, 2015), who state that some public leaders in Malta are disadvantaged because they are not given fair opportunities for their career development. Public officials either choose to be self-taught or look elsewhere for training, mainly when they do not find supportive leaders to move them up the career ladder.

As Steffen (2021) suggests, some international organisations let employees participate in mainstream coaching and training activities to help them develop through universities, colleges or in-house programmes. With human resource development, the MPS could consider offering competency-based training programmes to current SPOs and high-potentials (HIPOs). According to Bushe and Nagaishi (2018), organisations that offer such training programmes will be more engaged, productive and successful. International scholars (Hastings & Pennington, 2019; Schalk & Landeta, 2017) propose that coaching leaders follow accredited programmes offered by International Coaching Federation (ICF), IPEC and other professional bodies to strengthen their coaching competencies. Regrettably, in Malta, there are no accredited coaching bodies. Coaching programmes aim to improve specific skills such as negotiation and communication (Connor & Pakora, 2017). Coaching can also enhance organisational learning and now plays a significant role in talent development (TD), mentoring, international assignments, development programmes, and succession planning (SP) (Ali et al., 2019).

Some companies around the world – particularly in Central South America, Latin America, and Canada (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.3.1, p.31) – give prominence to organisational development (OD) programmes, including leadership and executive

coaching (Bushe & Nagaishi 2018; de Haan, 2019). Other organisations would consider mentorship programmes, too (Nyfoudi & Tasoulis, 2021). According to de Haan (2019), executive coaching incorporates some aspects of mentoring, which suggests that it may be appropriate for managers who have outgrown the conventions of traditional management programmes. These professional development programmes are being offered worldwide; however, in Malta, such programmes are not fully recognised, which is unfortunate because the country has so much potential for development. The findings (theme 6, subtheme 2) indicate that over half of survey respondents consider telling more effective than coaching. This is because there is a boss-centric culture within the MPS, and public officials are more influenced by directive/instructional approaches that encourage a ‘yes man, yes ma’am’ attitude. This could be a cultural issue inherited from earlier bosses over the years.

Alabdali (2020) suggests that managers who tell rather than coach waste their energy and make it more difficult for subordinates to accept new insights, thereby increasing resistance. A telling culture values expertise and experience, so it is no surprise that the manager is seen as having all the answers. However, in a coaching environment where people are encouraged to find their own solutions with help from others when needed - or even better approaches altogether, the employees may have more insight into what needs to be done (Van Wart, 2019).

Telling people what to do is associated with direct management/leadership approaches, which are viewed negatively in the literature (Hills, 2016). A directive management/leadership style (except in an emergency) is less effective than coaching because it limits creativity and ideas. For example, two respondents from the healthcare sector complained that their ideas are often rejected or shelved. Maltese coaches, on the other hand, say that SPOs ‘... *usually come up with innovative ideas but get discouraged when things do not go as planned,*’ and that ‘... *these managers live in mental paradigms,*’ ‘... *they do not show signs of curiosity,*’ ‘... *they just focus on reasons and limitations.*’

The directive management/leadership style avoids using collaboration. For example, an SPO from the finance sector reported that ‘*bosses ... think they know everything, and their way is the only way.*’ Although individuals can be encouraged to attach

importance to their management and leadership style, real development occurs when motivation drives behavioural change (Le Comte & McClelland, 2017).

Directive leaders expect orders to be followed without questions asked. For many people, this attitude leads to a lack of ownership of their work, thus increasing their dissatisfaction. Among these SPOs, individuals might be considering quitting the MPS. One healthcare SPO reported that *'... there were instances where I was insulted by seniors in front of my colleagues many times and was told that if I did not like it, I could pack my things and leave.'*

According to Ellinger and Bostrom (2002), leaders who succeed with coaching have empathy and trust in others. They feel less need for control and direction as they become more aware of and open to a mature understanding of authority and accountability. Cornelius et al. (2020) believe that awareness and accountability are strong drivers beyond training or coaching for self-development.

Several SPOs have said that senior managers decide without even consulting SPOs (theme 5, subtheme 1). As learnt from the literature (Homan Blanchard & Miller, 2010; Hermel-Stănescu & Svasta, 2014), coaching and consultancy are interrelated and require conventional competencies/skills: emotional intelligence, creative/critical thinking, and organisational and communication abilities. It appears, from what was claimed by SPOs, that senior managers lack such competencies.

As seen from the study, the preferred style of management is traditional, and the relationship between SPOs and senior managers is not strong. SPOs like to consult, but senior managers often reject this approach. Coaching and consultancy are two approaches that can strengthen the relationships between SPOs and senior managers. Helping or counselling does not mean telling people what to do. Some managers may call this 'advising' or 'managing' and think they are coaching. Van Genderen (2014) states that while coaching and consultancy are almost identical, they do not overlap. Both roles aim to enhance leadership development and learning (2.4.2).

The findings of this study suggest that some SPOs are implicitly already adopting a mentoring/consultancy approach supported by training, and some are explicitly and

deliberately adopting a coaching approach (see theme 3). In coaching, it is assumed that the other person knows what is best for them. In training, as with mentoring, it is assumed that there is knowledge to be imparted and that the coach ‘owns’ the process and determines the curriculum. In coaching, the coachee ‘owns’ the process.

One of the biggest challenges in organisations today is creating a safe environment for employees to raise concerns about misconduct and wrongdoing. Beyond the aspects of management and organisational deficiencies, the most surprising discovery of this study was the extent of political corruption, nepotism and favouritism, which indirectly link to the skills gap that has led the MPS to mediocre talent appointments. International scholars (Kibui, 2015; Kohestany & Yaghoubi, 2017) inform that human resources departments sometimes hire people from their own family, friends or political ties that are not fit for purpose. Favouring these individuals, even though they are incompetent, distorts the principle of fairness and helps with corruption. Public officials in Malta know that corruption is evident, but according to an SPO from the finance sector, ‘... *no one is doing anything about it.*’

Corruption may prevent the implementation of good governance (Belschak et al., 2018; Scott, 2020). There seems to be a strong correlation between corruption and a lack of accountability, transparency, and respect for the rule of law (Camilleri, 2021; Cassar & Munro, 2018; Ladyshewsky & Litten, 2021). The literature suggests that transparent leaders can create a fair work environment for subordinates to be role models (Kohestany & Yaghoubi, 2017). Transparent, strong, and accountable governance structures are essential for fighting corruption in Malta, particularly when entering ‘into public life out of the right political choice, to serve the public interest and not by accident or out of ambition and desire for profit’ as Plutarch suggests (cited in de Blois, 2004:57).

In a nation trying to fight corruption, public officials may be asked to sign an agreement and reveal their status, assets and trusts within 6 to 12 months. In these instances, a professional coach may have to help SPOs prevent any irregularities or violations of the law, such as corruption, nepotism and favouritism, before they happen. As indicated in the findings chapter, the most glaring examples of nepotism relate to senior management appointments within the MPS. When asked whether all senior managers

within the MPS were hired based on certain high-calibre academic criteria, most SPOs replied in the negative (theme 4, subtheme 3).

The Central Government of Malta (CGM) may need to promote a culture where meritocracy is rewarded for improving the quality of human resources management, become more transparent about the recruitment processes, and take other early reform initiatives. While affirmative action has been linked with improving professionalism within the public service (Edwards et al., 2016; Goodman & Cohen, 2018; Martino, 2019), using only those who meet high standards through an incentives or reward system encourages integrity among staff members. Coaches/leaders can ensure that Intelligence's hiring practices are implemented effectively while providing success rewards and motivating the overall employees' performances.

As a contribution to practice, the researcher has developed a conceptual framework model to enhance coaching learning and government practice within the public service of Malta. The model in [Figure 26](#) below represents the four dimensions that emerged from the study. At the top left, the first dimension signifies the cultural markers within the MPS. At the top right, the second dimension shows the Maltese skills deficits identified in the study. The third dimension (bottom right) is the perceived coaching practices of SPOs within the MPS, and the fourth dimension (bottom left) represents the practical implications. The relationship between these four dimensions and the proposed underlying causal mechanisms follows each part of this research. The linkages in the process are depicted with arrows, showing that earlier parts of the process can be revisited at later stages to ensure that management and leadership effectiveness is maintained. The arrows identify a meaningful relationship on how one variable affects another.

- 54% of managers within the MPS are underqualified.
- Political corruption, nepotism, and favouritism features in the MPS culture.
- SPOs prefer a traditional style of management.
- The preferred mode of communication within the MPS is through email exchanges.
- Confusion about coaching and what it offers to the MPS.
- MPS could be adopting a mentoring/consultancy approach, supported by training and coaching, with a particular focus on skills, development, and performance.
- SPOs within ICT and Digital Media Sector promote a culture of trust.
- ICI promote a culture of accountability.

- Coaching for Skills (Health and ICT)
- Coaching for Performance (Health)
- Coaching for Development (Finance)



- Management issues (communication, behaviour, and trust).
- Development opportunities (absence in further training).

- Offering good coaching Practice
- Building a culture of readiness through TD and SP approaches.

Figure 26: Perceived Gaps, Cultural Markers and Coaching in Sectors

An examination of this model shows that the influence is mono-directional rather than multi-directional. This is because Malta’s public service is rigid, and the Central Government’s instructions to public officials seem one-sided, leaving no room for reflexive feedback systems. On the other hand, the proposed approach is a continuous process for both new and experienced coaching leaders and can be developed in a multi-directional way, as everyone has the talents and skills to give and learn from one another. With these different processes, everyone could advance according to their abilities and competence.

### 5.3 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The six key themes that emerged from the combined findings to answer the research questions are (1) Skills Shortages and Retention Challenges; (2) Key Aspects of Coaching – purposes, processes and outcome; (3) Coaching for Systematic Talent Development; (4) Organisational Culture of the MPS; (5) Organisational and Management Failings; (6) Exploration of the Purposes of Coaching in the Maltese

Setting. Most of these themes comprised several collective pattern codes derived from the data.

## **5.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

**‘Can coaching contribute to closing the management and leadership skills gap in the Maltese Public Service?’**

### **5.4.1 Skills Shortages and Retention Challenges (Theme 1)**

#### *Skills Shortages*

One of the main objectives of this study was to summarise the skills gap in the MPS and identify which subset of these might be addressed by coaching (objective 1). The reasons for a skills gap may be clustered into four groups: (i) changing job requirements, (ii) labour supply fluctuations, (iii) education institutions not addressing the needs of industry, and (iv) lack of business investment in the workforce.

The EC findings from 2017 and 2018 show that the labour market is becoming increasingly restrictive, with more skills shortages constraining company growth prospects. According to the EC reports, there are not enough skilled workers to meet the current labour market needs. Early school-leaving rates are high, basic skill acquisition among young people is weak, and access/participation in lifelong learning activities for low-skilled individuals remains low. The EC also commented on how an increasing proportion of foreigners are taking up jobs usually filled by low-skilled workers. This mirrors a labour shortage across a wide range of skillsets.

In this study, most SPOs pointed out the adverse effects of current technological advances, the lack of human and financial resources in the MPS, and the general working conditions. Some Independent Coach Instructors (ICIs) claimed these bottlenecks have become apparent because of the difficulties posed by external market conditions and the mismatch between the skills sought by organisations and those possessed by individuals.

Articulating the required skills and competencies for succeeding roles has the added benefit of identifying skills gaps and training needs within the MPS. SPOs can learn behaviours essential for senior positions in public administration. For example, Woods (2016) suggests that coaches can be trained; each type of training has its own advantages and disadvantages. Third-party accredited training programmes, such as the ICF and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), are beneficial, as the developers know what competencies are required for effective coaching, and they adhere to a standard that makes sure coaching leaders are well-prepared for their roles (APECS, 2018; AC, 2016).

Whether Maltese managers/leaders have the necessary competencies for their role has generated much debate among scholars in recent years (Dimech, 2008; Ganado, 2017a, b; Glenn, 2012; Micallef, 2017). In developing successful coaching programmes, Littler (2020) proposes that content and criteria should be based on earlier organisational experiences and successes. Based on participants' beliefs rather than specific outcomes, these studies focused on coaching (not on its effectiveness). Most results obtained were related to executive coaching.

Following an in-depth analysis, the researcher reports that the gaps identified in this study were mainly related to communication and interaction issues (theme 5, subtheme 1), behaviour and trust issues (theme 5, subtheme 2) and absence of training (theme 5, subtheme 3). The study also reveals other issues that indirectly affect the skills gap: corruption, nepotism, and favouritism (theme 1, subtheme 1). Also, there were predictable resourcing problems which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

### ***Retention Challenges***

Interesting responses in this study suggest that within the MPS, *'experienced staff have left without giving a clear reason'* or *'have been poached by former employers'* (theme 1, subtheme 2) and moved elsewhere with greater perks and responsibilities. The reasons why people leave their organisations are diverse and complex, but it has been said that experienced employees do not receive enough administrative support from management. This leads to lower retention rates for public sector jobs which can be costly in terms of both time spent training new hires and salaries paid towards someone

who does not want or need the job anymore (Cregård & Corin, 2019 George, 2015; Macdonald, 2018).

This study shows that Maltese public officials do not earn enough for their role and are compensated poorly. According to the National Statistics Office (2021), the average annual gross salary in Malta is around 18,660 euros. Public officials feel (and are actually) underpaid compared to other sectors in Malta. Within the MPS, a uniform salary structure is based on a twenty-tier salary scale (salary scale 1 is the highest and 20 is the lowest). According to Cornell & Sundell (2020), low salaries in the public sector are one of the main reasons for the attribution of incompetence, which is why perhaps even in Malta, this issue is leading the MPS to become an opaque, corrupt administration.

Although maintaining a comparatively broad public labour market has benefits, the size of the public sector can be detrimental to the private sector of the Maltese economy. This occurs only when private-sector incomes are higher than public-sector wages (or when the benefits of public-sector employment are more favourable) and when private-sector workers are comparatively inflexible (Basantwani et al., 2021). Flexible wages in the public sector stabilise wages in the private sector, while fixed wages in the public sector have the opposite effect. Malta's overall annual separation rate or turnover rate is 10% – the highest in the European Union (EU), compared to the average (7.5%) (MISCO, 2021).

#### **5.4.2 Key Aspects of Coaching – Purposes, Processes and Outcome (Theme 2)**

‘Can coaching contribute to closing the management and leadership skills gap in the MPS?’ The following sections justify how coaching can contribute to solving this problem. The first section is designed to analyse the coaching phenomenon in terms of leadership effectiveness and development, and the subsequent section examines the coaching engagements.

### ***Coaching for Leadership Effectiveness and Development***

Leadership can be described as the ability to persuade others to behave differently and willingly. It is the process of influencing people to do their best to achieve the desired outcome; it involves developing and communicating a vision for the future, motivating people, and securing their engagement. Other definitions (there are many) include: ‘Leadership is an indirect ability to lead people by setting an inspiring example to develop and transform individuals’ (Adair, 2006); ‘the capacity to translate intentions into reality and sustain it’ (Bennis & Nanus, 1985:17). It is also ‘the process of influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts toward goal-setting and goal achievement’ (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2007:696), and ‘a leader’s singular job is to get results’ (Goleman, 2000:78).

Becoming a good leader takes considerable time and effort. It requires significant personal commitment and drives. Like medicine and many other professions, leadership combines science and practice (Kuna, 2019; Yenziaras et al., 2020). Scholars studying leadership are always looking for what works and what does not. The phrase ‘practice’ implies that leaders may constantly learn how to do it better. A great leader within the MPS might recognise and nurture talent throughout the organisation; hence, identifying talented individuals will complement the team and inspire future leaders. This thesis demonstrates that the war for talent is fierce because few leaders can fill vacant positions. Despite acknowledging that leadership is more difficult today than it used to be, leadership development efforts have not kept pace with the demand for leaders.

Many factors influence leadership effectiveness. In this study, an effective leader was described by ICIs as *‘having good leadership skills, initiating change and bringing the best out of people’* (p.144). Participants added that SPOs need to figure out which issues matter most and identify the right skills to shape their teams and the overall service. SPOs say that effective leadership can be achieved by *‘being open to criticism,’ ‘keeping up-to-date,’ ‘writing less,’ ‘speaking more,’* and *‘being a good listener’* (p.133). Previous literature (Bawany, 2015; Gormley & van Nieuwerburgh, 2014) suggests that effective leaders are confident, know what they want, and lead by example. They are respected by their team, recognise the benefits of consulting others, and can switch between leadership styles.

Today's leaders use many distinctive styles (Uslu, 2019) when leading their teams. Deciding which style is most appropriate for a particular situation depends on the work environment and the organisation's vision. Scholars such as Connor and Pakora (2017) suggest moving between mentoring (directive/instructional) and coaching (non-directive) roles. However, directive leadership can be highly effective in emergencies and crises and may breed security in leaders.

Leaders need to learn from their mistakes and put themselves fully and unconditionally at the service of those they lead. Mistakes are an opportunity for growth when appropriately managed – both in implementation (learning how not to do something) and in psychological development, where people can process complex information or lessons learned without fear of consequences. Leaders who handle these situations with integrity and accountability reduce the space for harmful behaviour because they advocate for what is right instead of justifying themselves. For Malta to adopt sustainable development and succeed in nation-building, it would need leadership committed to the rule of law (see Borg, 2018; Reuters, 2017) that shows a sense of fairness and democratic tolerance; in other words, leadership with '*ability*', '*integrity*' and '*competence*', as this study suggests – and above all, leadership that can see beyond the ostentatious pomp of office.

As part of the typical management process, coaching involves informing the individual about their performance, for example, by asking questions to determine how thoughtful their actions are (Adair, 2006). This is a controlled delegation where employees are made aware of what is expected and what they need to know and do to perform the job properly (Kuna, 2019). For example, it allows managers to advise when later instructions may be perceived as intrusive. Leaders can use each scenario to enhance learning and encourage people to think about higher-level challenges and solutions (Yeniaras et al., 2020).

Coaching's contribution to leadership is still relatively under-researched compared to other areas of leadership development. There is sound literature on coaching and constructivist leadership, in which the style of leaders differs from that of external coaches (St John-Brooks, 2019; Smith, 2021). The literature suggests that coaching creates a 'culture of development' and helps discover opportunities (Grego-Planer

2019). Hiring a coach can be done either as part of leadership development programmes or by internal leaders. Coaching within the MPS could be a platform for SPOs to vent their anger, frustrations, and concerns about their seniors. Also, senior managers can use coaching to reduce negativity, improve communication skills, improve behaviour, and build relationships with any organisation member, despite their rank.

Interestingly, 60% of SPOs have said they had a coach at some point, and 70% who have been coached say that private coaching practice helped them improve their personal and professional skills by connecting more with people and bringing more energy and creativity to their work. These SPOs feel *'more like a coach'* and *'better prepared to serve their team.'* As Aguilar (2020) suggests, the core components of effective coaching are discussion, communication, and networking.

### ***Coaching Engagements***

Coaching helps SPOs and seniors understand different worldviews and the skills needed to embrace the coaching process (Nardone et al., 2018). A healthcare SPO noted that *'the coaching leader needs to be fully engaged, open on what they are about to say, be fully involved, anticipate results, and most importantly, be honest in their approach.'*

According to Lai et al. (2020), researchers have developed several methods to encourage engagement, such as coaching employees on their work, exploring potential difficulties employees encounter, and offering emotional support to solve problems. This involves being open to communication, accepting and appreciating employees' ideas, emphasising the individual rather than work, paying specific attention to personal needs, building trust, and offering constructive feedback.

An SPO from the financial sector said that he believes in constructive feedback because when people talk, *'they follow a train of thought'* that helps him to *'... see things from different perspectives and explore further avenues.'* An SPO from ICT and digital media said she looks *'... for someone with more experience ... who brings new perspectives.'* Through feedback, the coached person is likely to become

supportive and passionate about identifying problems and understanding the context of the organisation. For SPOs, this means understanding what senior leaders expect to foster a positive state of mind in the workplace. The analysis of this study suggests that qualifications and experience, honesty and trust, good communication skills, openness in confidential discussions, and constructive feedback are the critical determinants of coaching engagement within the MPS. During the engagement phase, both parties discuss their goals, values and expectations.

The following section provides insights for a systematic development approach to close the leadership skill gap within the MPS and to develop the next generation of talented leaders.

### **5.4.3 Coaching for Systematic Talent Development (Theme 3)**

#### ***How Can Coaching Respond to the Senior Leadership Skills Gap?***

The study indicates that SPOs are still influenced by the traditional leadership style, which is a boss-centric culture. The study also raised concerns about communication, behaviour, trust, and training, even regarding the broader challenges of nepotism and corruption. There are also organisational issues such as lack of trust in sectors (except for ICT and digital media), bullying, and mismanagement of seniors. However, coaching is already filling the gap left by MPS's lack of professional/leadership development. A comprehensive programme of coach training would be required for success in better talent management (TM), leadership development, and SP in general.

Organisations worldwide often prepare their training to save costs and improve the organisational culture (OC) and work values (Odor, 2018). One could try to balance the cost of effective coaching against other interventions such as staff training, consultancy, tutoring, conference attendance, external qualifications, etc. As shown in Chapter 2, subsection 2.3.1, some authors (Fusarelli et al., 2018; Kohestany & Yaghoubi, 2017) claimed that this professional discipline is quite expensive (p.31). Nevertheless, Lancer and Megginson (2016) showed that many organisations had conducted cost-benefit analyses, proving that coaching and mentoring are cost-effective.

With so many available options, deciding which methods to use is daunting. In these situations, organisations typically conduct a training needs analysis (TNA) to identify employees who need training and the type of training that will be required. As Gagné (2009 a, b) and Garavan et al. (2012) suggest, there are four broad areas that organisations should consider: (i) identification (whom to develop), (ii) design (the competencies for employees to develop at their own pace throughout their career), (iii) evaluation (measurement of effectiveness), and (iv) organisational management support.

A properly conducted TNA will yield detailed information about the training needed, its timing, and the training population. This allows a trainer to either construct a new programme, find an up-to-date one that serves the purpose, or obtain one externally. The person who creates or proposes the training is not necessarily the person who delivers and reports the training (Sheehan et al., 2018). The next stage in a TNA should, at a minimum, transform the identified needs into goals; then, those goals can be utilised to create or select a training strategy. Generally, individuals and companies that provide TNA services classify themselves as management or training consultants. Industrial psychologists sometimes provide such services, although there are many other possible titles, such as organisational consultants, organisational psychologists, and development advisors (Huffington & Brunning, 2018).

Coaching leaders can focus on those individuals who will benefit the most from coaching and those whose coaching will make a significant impact. This study suggests there is a need to identify specific areas of focus at the beginning of any development programme. Developmental coaching (DC) may be the fastest-growing approach to leadership development (Hastings & Kane 2018). It is a proven method to help people perform well in volatile situations by allowing them to reconceptualise the world and reframe the problem as drivers of change (Yeniaras et al., 2020). Unlike traditional coaching, DC uses assessments and past experiences to address development. The MPS could then work to develop a culture that welcomes everyone into the organisation by offering equal pay and benefits, providing workplace accessibility, and supporting training and coaching initiatives. The coaching programme could address authority issues through training, continuing professional development, and regular coaching supervision.

### ***How Can Coaching Within the MPS Develop the Next Generation of Talent and Transform its Leaders?***

Developing people does not mean shirking responsibility for delivering results. It means setting expectations and holding people accountable for meeting them. Often, accountability is implicit, like the self-imposed pressure to succeed in the eyes of one's peers. In other instances, accountability is explicit, such as when good and substandard performance has consequences, and everyone knows about them. The role of the coaching leader may be to create the next generation of leaders who can be trusted and supported by the organisation. Good coaches have the credibility to support knowledge and business acumen; they know what they must do; they are trustworthy and adept at managing confidentiality and juggling the sometimes-competing demands of the organisation.

This study suggests that a systematic approach is needed to identify goals and develop talent and expertise within the MPS. According to some authors (Dai, 2019; Ladyshevsky & Taplin, 2018), talent and knowledge are developed through coaching and by building team effectiveness through action learning. Action learning is a systematic method through which people, groups and organisations learn in real (rather than simulated) work. It aims to strike a balance between action and reflection, to learn from past experiences and build more sophisticated ways of knowing, doing and being.

Authors such as Einzig (2017) and Radović et al. (2020) investigated one of the most crucial leadership capabilities: team performance. They provided a high-level overview of the broad roles and behaviours that team leaders may use to develop conditions and achieve exceptional results. These five prerequisite conditions are: (i) a real team, (ii) a clear direction, (iii) an enabling structure, (iv) a supportive organisational context, and (v) expert coaching. The science and art of fostering team effectiveness become an ongoing process for creating an engaged team with clear direction. Once the team is prepared, SPOs can always turn to the coaching leader for advice or a listening ear. Both may agree on the conditions under which SPOs can act independently by following the coaching leaders' advice.

Some different skills and roles suit different people to perform. How they are identified, developed and retained can have a significant impact on the long-term

viability of the MPS. This study has shown that senior managers within the MPS are not committed to developing their people –compelling evidence for the argument is the lack of post-senior management training for SPOs. Whatever efforts are made to increase the likelihood that a talented person will learn from experience, the best intervention might be coaching with the person’s boss rather than with the person.

Middle managers are traditionally brought up from the lower management ranks and require coaching or other forms of professional development to improve their skills. Succession management programmes typically target higher levels but need to be flexible systems that focus on development activities. Leaders who understand when and how to use each proactive strategy are more likely to succeed in their attempts to influence subordinates, peers and superiors - remembering that there are no easy solutions and that becoming an effective leader takes time and effort. It requires a high-level of personal commitment, motivation and critical thinking.

Critical thinking was described in the study as a *‘habit of mind’* to solve personal and professional problems. Critical thinking requires the individual’s ability to gather information, look at problems from a team perspective, and consider the impact on the organisation at all levels. This searching and weighing of meaning fit closely with the coaching approach, which focuses on asking questions, considering alternative approaches, and making well-informed decisions. This learning process encompasses the person’s ability to learn from their experience.

If learning is integrated explicitly into work activities, the opportunities for developmental progress increase, but so do the learning barriers. For example, many learning interventions miss their goals due to a lack of willingness to be coached (Tang, 2019). Coaching strategies are based on several HR initiatives, which include leadership assessments to predict performance (selection and placement), measure performance (hold leaders accountable and reward satisfactory performance), diagnose performance gaps, and set directions for improvement and career development. The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale and the Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal are two assessments commonly used by global organisations (Li & Bates, 2019).

To coach others effectively, the coaching leader must understand their attitudes, values and emotions. S/he may need to gather the information and skills to support the use of tactics likely to be helpful and to maintain good rapport with the people, so SPOs rely on them for help and collaboration, even if they have little or no power over them. When there is a high-level of mutual trust and respect, it is easier to win people's cooperation and commitment. How does one balance development needs and opportunities if one assumes a sufficient degree of mutual respect, trust, and commitment to growth? Much development can take place without a promotion or lateral move – such as setting specific goals, designing work to optimise development, providing coaching and feedback, engaging with key people and projects, utilising limited assignments, information and resources, and participating in training and educational programmes to recognise competencies before others do. Typically, these competencies are related to distinct aspects of intellectual and interpersonal skills, as this study suggests.

People's aspirations change over time in response to circumstances and experiences, so it is necessary to let SPOs at different ranks know they are appreciated for their work, especially if they go beyond what is expected of them. This is how the next generation of talent/leadership in MPS should be developed.

## **5.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

**‘What awareness or understanding of coaching practices do Maltese SPOs and coaches have?’**

### **5.5.1 Organisational Culture of the MPS (Theme 4)**

#### ***A Boss-Centric Culture***

Culture has many meanings, ranging from regional, national, and tribal to a culture of a specific practice, such as coaching culture (Crozier, 1964; Levy-Leboyer, 1996; Selznick, 1957; Weber, 1949). It considers values, competencies, strategies, policies and procedures. Although many try to take steps in the right direction, leaders often get the culture of how they behave, not necessarily the culture they want to see (Clutterbuck et al., 2019). For example, this study demonstrates that SPOs have a

conventional type of leadership rooted deep within the boss-centric culture. This type of leadership could lead to bullying and mismanagement, political corruption, nepotism and favouritism, as confirmed by various scholars (Domorenok et al., 2021; Hladio, 2017; Howlett & Saguin, 2018).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, an ethos within the MPS promotes a boss-centric ‘yes man, yes ma’am’ culture. The assumption is that leaders ‘*do what they want...*’ because of ‘*...their political background*’ (p.152). This suggests that political favouritism is evident in the appointment of managers within the MPS. Masuku and Jili (2019) observed a similar result pattern in the study and argued that political factors play a crucial role in the appointment of managers in public institutions. Political dynamics can negatively affect OC if they cross the line of creating an uncomfortable or hostile work dynamic (Liu & Kianto, 2021; Odor, 2018).

There can be both positive and negative OC. A hostile workplace culture creates poor internal communication, a lack of team spirit, micromanagement, office gossip, low engagement and a lack of empathy. A positive workplace culture, on the other hand, creates strong diversity, feedback, growth and development (Odor, 2018). One step towards this is to work across the organisation to define what a positive OC would look and feel like. This can have significant benefits in terms of reducing stress in teamwork and improving performance management for personal development. The proactive involvement of mentors and coaches by upper, middle or lower management within the MPS could lead to the sustainable development of an OC based on a modern approach to building a strong relationship between SPOs and upper managers.

Data from SPOs suggests that senior managers are judgemental. For example, 80% of SPOs say their supervisors ‘*impose*’, are ‘*naïve about accepting apologies*’, ‘*bad-tempered*’, ‘*demanding*’ and ‘*too proud*’ (p.160). Senior managers may be immersed in constant judgements, evaluations and opinions. The problem is that they can easily get caught up in their values and assumptions. In the workplace, judgement stifles creativity, as seniors quickly label their people, beliefs, actions and categorise them as wrongdoers. Through coaching, seniors could actively cultivate serenity and understanding to silence the constant effort to be judgemental (Will et al., 2019). It gets no easier with practice, but it can help cultivate compassion and empathy. When

public leaders genuinely see and care about other people, they are less likely to judge SPOs negatively.

This study supports the work of Kim et al. (2020), who indicate that a command-and-control leadership style is an enticing approach but inhibits learning and creativity. SPOs within sectors might prefer this approach to closely supervise and control workers. This strategy stresses the distinction between management and employees, and it is likely to result in a company culture that fosters a ‘we–they’ mentality, along with the subsequent corresponding attitudes. This style is repetitive; it teaches people to follow directions without questioning and resist change. It devalues individual learning and creativity and suppresses inner motivation; people act more out of self-preservation instincts and fear than inner inspiration. They are generally not self-motivated or inspired to perform well, and their sense of accomplishment relies on tight leadership control (Seddon, 2019; Uslu, 2019). On the other side of the coin, managers who use this leadership style may challenge employees to work towards organisational goals and determine the path by which they can meet those goals. For example, directive leaders can advise and mentor, explain roles and responsibilities, remove barriers to job performance, and reward employees when necessary. While command-and-control can be effective (Durmus et al., 2020), this style conveys the message that subordinates are expected to do as they are told and may also restrict their freedom of expression.

Mary Parker Follett, a management pioneer, said that a boss’s effectiveness is not how well s/he can command but how little bossing they do (Mirvis et al., 2021). As Hill and Lineback (2011) stated in their book *Being the Boss: The Three Imperatives for Becoming a Great Leader*, nobody likes to be bossed around. In the HBR Blog Network, Hill and Lineback (2011) mentioned that any organisation can succeed only if management and leadership skills are linked. Although the terms ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ are often used interchangeably in the literature (Le Comte & McClelland, 2017; Lee et al., 2019), this does not mean they are synonymous.

The findings of this study demonstrate that SPOs and senior teams are expected to be in a commanding role; but the literature (Biech, 2022; Subotnik et al., 2021) has shown that today in several organisations around the world, there has been a clear shift

towards a participative style of leadership that encourages employees to be SF. The literature (Knights, 2021; Whitley et al., 2018) informs that several managers worldwide have concentrated on solution-focused (SF) approaches. An SF approach avoids analysing the problem; the coaching leader focuses on the coachees with the scope to find solutions. Scholars such as Einzig (2017) and Hendrikz and Engelbrecht (2019) found that SF approaches to leadership roles were crucial in determining the highest possible training standards. Visser (2012) examined three critical underlying assumptions of the SF approach: people, change, and support (see Table 5). With enough validation and without the coach controlling or intervening with the outcomes, coachees will overcome difficulties and deal with situations that once seemed problematic (Ab Razak, 2020).

Sometimes suggestions may sound like orders, mainly when those managers are someone else's bosses. It can be helpful if these managers conceptualise a spectrum, a sliding scale between directive and non-directive leadership styles. The greatest challenge is identifying and evaluating a leadership style that changes specific leadership behaviours. For example, in coaching, the manager/coaching leader may slide back and forth as needed and generally stay on the right side of the non-directive/self-directed approach (Hermel-Stănescu & Svasta, 2014; Homan Blanchard & Miller, 2010; Van Genderen, 2014; Zeus et al., 2008). Many methods and materials are available to prepare and equip leaders to improve their skills (see Lacerenza et al., 2017). Such skills include complexity, communication, relationship, influence, motivation, engagement, emotional intelligence, empathy, diversity, and inclusion. Given that OC is a key issue coaching and mentoring should be included among the various interventions.

Despite the hype about coaching, few organisations worldwide have a strong coaching culture (Percy & Dow, 2021). According to David Clutterbuck and David Megginson, co-founders of the EMCC, a coaching culture is a predominant style of management and collaboration in which a commitment to organisational growth is embedded in a parallel commitment to people's development.

### ***Politicised Nature of the Senior and Middle-Management Roles***

SPOs' data suggests that seniors who hold top positions seem to care little about their employees. One healthcare SPO, for example, stated: *'this Government appoints people to take on responsibilities in very senior positions for political reasons. They do not care about us. What they care about are budgets and numbers.'* Views like this support Dimech's (2008) claims about the impunity of those holding leadership positions. As Greco (2019) contended, this leads to a situation where 'who you know' is more important than 'what you know'. Perhaps this is why SPOs do *'not bother to seek professional development'* within the MPS.

Under Article 15(2)(i) of the Employment and Training Services Act, public officials are recruited based on positions of trust in ministerial secretariats. The law expressly states that merit-based recruitment and promotion are prerequisites for ensuring the impartiality and quality of public service delivery. However, the results contradict this bill.

Malta's present Labour Party Government under the new Prime Minister, Dr Robert Abela, which has recently won a landslide election victory (politico.eu, 2022), may consider 'hiring and firing' policies as a significant contributor to reducing the risk of corruption, nepotism and favouritism within the MPS. In addition, appropriate remuneration could be offered to maintain the quality of staff within sectors.

Further analysis showed that SPOs depend on the Ministry's intervention in the departments' day-to-day operations (p.154). The pressure often results in SPOs feeling anxious, fearing failing or losing face, being excluded, and less active in their development. Only 25% of those surveyed said they wanted to overcome their fear of failure and become successful leaders. Perhaps the other 75% did not fear failure after all. One possible explanation is that SPOs find it challenging to try new things or get involved. The prospect of failure poses such a large psychological threat to SPOs' motivation that it could, without their awareness, sabotage their chances of success. Failure can debilitate and lead to fear of possible negative judgements from others (Hicks, 2018; Palmer & Szymanska, 2018). Areas for further research may include the role of coaching programmes in managing cultural leadership transitions in public sector settings. Once again, this calls for further investigation.

### ***Political Corruption, Nepotism and Favouritism***

The debate on nepotism and favouritism continues. Several respondents (67%) in the healthcare sector assert that *‘Malta is a small island with limited opportunities to rise to leadership positions’*. Favouritism and nepotism as phenomena have a negative impact on organisational performance. Authors such as Sroka and Vveinhardt (2020) and Mishra (2021) believe these two factors lead to unethical behaviour at work and decrease labour productivity. One’s definition of ‘unethical’ depends on one’s own ethical standards and the acceptable standards defined by society. However, these societal definitions can be overridden and suppressed by leaders who demand too much of their followers in an overly dictatorial and autocratic manner (Tanskanen et al., 2019).

Respondents in the survey related unethical behaviour to *‘corruption and favouritism,’ ‘friendship,’ ‘discrimination,’* and *‘self-interest’* (p.157). A majority (63%) of survey respondents felt leadership positions within the MPS had unfairly and prejudicially patronised their followers. This is a significant problem, where both nepotism and favouritism could impede the career paths of talented and capable employees within the service. If the CGM considers an anti-corruption strategy, competent authorities should address the deep-rooted reluctance in society to report crimes committed by public officials. As the situation stands, public officials are afraid to speak out because they could either lose their jobs or be threatened in other ways. Ethical public sector leaders can reduce corruption within the MPS by including monitoring and control mechanisms, coaching, recognising ethical behaviour and communicating ethical expectations, and sanctioning corrupt practices by others.

SPOs in this study were asked about their perceptions of what is meant by favouritism. Available data suggest that 37% of SPOs perceive favouritism as flexible behaviour towards people with the same political views. According to the literature (Mishra, 2021; Sroka & Vveinhardt, 2020), favouritism increases work stress and leads to distrust among working colleagues. When trust is low, a culture of blame prevails (Tytko et al., 2020). Everyone looks out for themselves, with negative thoughts about themselves and others. Conversely, when an atmosphere of trust is created through mindfulness and compassion, there will be strong relationships at work, rapport, and

the right conditions for great coaching outcomes (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2020; Lai & Smith, 2021).

According to Szymanska (2022), one of the coach's primary responsibilities is to help the coachee challenge and overcome their maladaptive and skewed perceptions. A manager/leader may approach a conflict as a collaborator rather than an adversary, seeking mutually beneficial outcomes by keeping the affected parties satisfied without blame and judgement. The employee can then plan countermeasures through feedback and coaching to promote awareness of their rights, responsibilities and duties; retain experienced employees; promote the OC's transformation; and its core values, legacy, and cultural innovation.

### **5.5.2 Organisational and Management Failings (Theme 5)**

This section discusses the causes and how to deal with organisational deficiencies within the MPS; it illustrates that SPOs and their seniors lack communication skills and trust. The discussion concludes by suggesting a coaching programme to meet the overarching interests of the MPS, which can be a springboard for organisational and leadership development within sectors.

#### ***Communication and Interaction Issues***

Passmore and Lai (2020) have noted that communication skills are a crucial coach trait for coaching success, but the nature of this study and its population (i.e., SPOs and ICIs from Malta) may limit this generalisability; thus, other combined skills strategies and approaches are featured in Themes 2 and 3.

Improving the government's communication has become one of the essential tasks for the CGM. Putting the concepts of open into practice, government, public participation, and governance have presented challenges for the government when seeking to 'stay in touch' with its stakeholders. The classic definition of a communication channel characterises it as the technical (or formal) side of the communication process that allows us to transmit information from sender to receiver and vice versa (Reinsch & Lewis, 1984). There are various communication channels within the MPS, such as e-mail, voicemail, messaging, meetings, etc. In the survey, 48% of respondents indicated

that they prefer communicating with their superiors via e-mail. This shows an important cultural marker. Several respondents pointed out that this communication mechanism is sometimes used as a safety precaution. For example, an SPO from the finance sector said, *'it is important to communicate certain things via e-mail to prove what has been done and discussed.'*

Concrete preferences depend on social competence, meaning the ability to interact appropriately and effectively (Junge et al., 2020). Some studies (Fröhlich et al., 2019; Goswami et al., 2018) have shown that combinations of two or more channels are fairly common and can occur sequentially or simultaneously. Since this study did not measure coaching outcomes for all communication modalities in the three main sectors, no conclusions can be drawn about its effectiveness.

In this study, 93% of SPOs confirmed that they do not share their sentiments with their superiors; hence, they remain silent. This points to a systemic problem, and one can wonder what these officials do when faced with larger problems (e.g., corruption – a case in point). A systemic approach to coaching can help people recognise unaware behavioural patterns. This approach can help them see their experiences in new ways. It also encourages a holistic approach where other parts of the system may relate to the issue at hand. A systemic coaching approach emphasises the value of minor changes while highlighting the complexity, unpredictability, and contextual elements. It also encourages openness, growth and creativity (Ives et al., 2021).

Many respondents who answered the questionnaire felt disrespected and unsupported by their seniors and reported that their suggestions were put on hold or even rejected. For example, a healthcare SPO said that *'ideas and constructive criticism are not welcomed or encouraged, especially if they think these are not in line with their management ideology.'* An implication of this is that SPOs' sense of responsibility within the MPS diminishes because they feel they cannot act on their own initiative. They lose their sense of ownership and feel less accountable for their job performance. They can become so resentful that they take an attitude of not helping because their seniors do not seem to care much.

Communication in leadership requires training to equip SPOs with information on the tools, methods and objectives used within the MPS's performance management system. Performance management is an ongoing communication process between superiors and subordinates to help the organisation meet its strategic goals (Junge et al., 2020).

Clarifying expectations, identifying and setting goals, evaluating results and providing feedback are all part of the communication process (Churchill, 2022). With regular updating, an assigned coach can develop a training communication plan and, as a result, oversee the implementation of all training programmes offered by the MPS. All employees can meet their goals when clear expectations are communicated. Rather than helping coachees change their values and beliefs due to sentimental issues, the coach's role is to stimulate ideas and action towards better performances. From this perspective, the researcher learnt that coaching is primarily about improving performance and enabling successful action rather than addressing feelings and thoughts (Gascó-Hernández et al., 2018). This strategy is often called 'brief coaching' (Baby & Swain, 2018) because it tries to accomplish its mission quickly and focuses on a well-defined issue or goal.

The analyses indicate that coaching can be one of the obvious ways to improve communication within sectors. As the literature suggests (Belschak et al., 2018; Hunt & Weintraub, 2007; Scott, 2020), people will know what is expected of them and how their work fits into a larger vision or strategy. This occurs only if the senior management team genuinely supports and rewards coaching.

### ***Behaviour and Trust Issues***

It was interesting to note from the study that, unlike the other two main sectors, there is a culture of trust in the ICT and digital media sector. SPOs' comments were coded as follows, illustrated by quotations.

- (i) Mutual trust and relationships – *'Our roles as SPOs depend on whom we trust and how mutual relationships are built....'*

- (ii) Developing rapport – *‘The most important thing in this relationship is to get to know each other first, then build trust and develop rapport.’*
- (iii) Supporting behaviours – *‘... my superior is always there for me, and he is not judgemental. He understands me, trusts me, and we have a good relationship with each other.’*
- (iv) Agreement on expectations – *‘... If I make mistakes, that’s okay because he wants me to learn from them.’*
- (v) Development and growth – *‘... once I realised that she was genuinely interested in my professional development and growth, I trusted her and became loyal to her.’*

In contrast with the above statements, the analysis of this study also reveals that senior managers react aggressively when SPOs ask for help. They do not encourage dialogue and spread/listen to gossip in the workplace. Although much research has focused on leaders’ positive influence on individual and organisational outcomes (Kyle et al., 2017), this study provides conflicting views, suggesting that SPOs are unhappy with how their superiors act, and both parties lack trust.

In a coaching setting, trust refers to the confidence that enables the coaching leader to be supportive, non-judgemental, and challenging while letting the client be open, honest and vulnerable. The mutual security needed to manage expectations, set boundaries and engage in open and honest discourse is provided through trust (Akhbari & Hadders-Algra, 2020). Trust violations are associated with reluctance to change and lower satisfaction levels (Kharouf & Lund, 2019). The role of trust violations has received little attention in the coaching field. Again, this might call for further research.

Within the MPS, senior managers may have been influenced by their peers if they ignore the needs of those around them (Matosic et al., 2017). In this study, an SPO from the finance sector reported that *‘... bosses do not care much about what we know and what skills we develop.’* Another finance SPO said his Director-General told him he had been promoted to give him answers, not to ask questions (p.162). A healthcare SPO testified to being insulted by seniors in front of his colleagues; he was told that if he did not like it, he could pack his things and leave (p.187). These statements imply cognitive issues among senior managers. This inner drive can be addressed through

team coaching, which may allow public officials at all levels to suggest behaviour-change (Van Wart, 2019).

Sari and Kurniawati (2022) advocate a behavioural strategy that enables practical change rather than psychological adjustment. This method is action-oriented in the sense that it looks to the future and seeks to bring about change in real-world contexts; however, it keeps a strong emphasis on personal growth, emphasises the importance of learning, and to a lesser degree, adopts a therapeutic perspective on the coaching relationship.

### ***Absence of Training***

Training today is synonymous with on-the-job training, which is more insightful than traditional face-to-face training (Yu & Low, 2022). The training aims to give people information and more skills; it involves input, practice and feedback. In the literature (Sheehan et al., 2018; Woods, 2016), a trainer is described as an expert who shares his/her knowledge and skills with the individuals they are instructing.

The training methods vary and are interactive and participatory, giving those under instruction a chance to practise. One drawback of training is that what is learnt is often implemented for a week or so but then forgotten as people revert to what is more familiar to them (D'Amour et al., 2020). New skills and knowledge take time to embed; this is where coaching and mentoring may help consolidate training.

Structured training refers to a fixed learning agenda and a prepared approach to making learning a reality. For example, if someone is being trained in a classroom, the trainer would use a structured approach to ensure a specific amount of information is learnt within a specific time frame. Coaching follows a more flexible format, according to the coachee's goals; both the coachee and the coach influence the direction and content of the sessions. Coaching also gives individuals real responsibility for learning and encourages them to embark on continuous professional development (CPD) activities (Papanthymou & Darra, 2019).

My findings show that experienced SPOs undertake private coaching (pp.136, 165, 168–169, 176) outside the MPS as part of their CPD activities. SPOs are reluctant to take the initiative within the MPS because their superiors overrule them. Thus, developing a more open and consultative management approach may be required. These practices bring clarity to strategy and goals that enable employees to do what they do best through training or coaching (Sheehan et al., 2018; Woods, 2016).

Coaching is viewed from an analytical perspective as a form of management practice with some training characteristics (Papanthymou & Darra, 2019). Rather than teaching coachees new things, as would be the case with training, the workers lead coaching themselves, using their knowledge and experience to devise their own solutions (Sheehan et al., 2018; Woods, 2016). When employees are coached and meet their expectations, they are more likely to trust and listen to their superiors' advice, especially when struggling with personal or professional issues. With better training, support and encouragement from MPS leaders, SPOs will make a difference and take an interest in their growth and development.

Coaching can profoundly impact an individual's growth and development, but it is not without risks. Managers unfamiliar with coaching may hesitate or be sceptical if they have not received training (Ladyshevsky & Taplin, 2018). Those with coaching experience will be more inclined to encourage their team members to do the same and will develop their own talents as coaches (Syakur et al., 2020). According to Lee et al. (2019), training in coaching skills is a good first step but insufficient. This is supported by Mofield and Phelps (2021), who state that organisations need to foster a culture that supports coaching to ensure the continued use and role modelling of coaching skills. It is unrealistic to expect managers to suddenly change their leadership style without training and support. This is an issue which SPOs are currently experiencing, though having limited training with no support from their seniors.

SPOs within the MPS occupy responsible roles despite lacking formal and structured training in management, leadership, or OD. SPOs who achieve positions of authority and trust have often achieved these roles because of nepotism. Whilst the Institute for the Public Service (IPS) offers the senior management toolkit programme for current and aspiring managers, this rarely provides the right set of skills, experiences, maturity,

and values to provide enough leadership and management in a constantly changing world, where people's expectations not only shift but also change dramatically with time. As discussed in several sections of this project, there are no coaching programmes supplied within the MPS; the only programme available is the senior management toolkit for those who have recently been appointed to higher levels or are interested in reaching a much higher future position. After completion of this programme, there are no other training programmes for SPOs to further their career.

There are compelling reasons to set up a coaching programme for SPOs, along with a strategic and needs-based assessment to address the broader interests of the MPS. Untrained and dissatisfied employees who feel underutilised are more likely to be frustrated with their jobs and be less loyal to the company. This means they may be subjected to organisational failings and barely meet the minimum standards. This contributes to SPOs leaving the MPS and perhaps moving to greener pastures (Tabone & Spiteri Gingell, 2013).

## **5.6 RESEARCH QUESTION 3**

**'What views do Maltese SPOs have about coaching as a form of professional development?'**

### **5.6.1 Exploration of the Purposes of Coaching in the Maltese Setting (Theme 6)**

The investigation in this section is twofold. First, it will focus on the distinct types of coaching that already exist within the MPS (objective 2); and second, it will examine how practitioners perceive coaching in Malta (objective 3).

#### ***Confusion About the Nature and Practice of Coaching***

In this study, the concept of coaching was considered from different angles. Coaching in Malta was said to be '*... in its infancy and suffers from a lack of clear standards; it is still at an early and conceptual phase, has not taken hold as a term, and needs to be actively promoted.*' Furthermore, 30% of survey respondents see coaching as '*a developing concept*'; 30% agree that '*the power of coaching is clear*' and consider coaching to be '*as mature as each coach*'. The other 40% view coaching as '*a way of*

*teaching and learning*'. SPOs and coaches have agreed that coaching in the workplace offers fair value for money as job-coach education.

Among many conceptions and terminologies perceived by SPOs under the misnomer of 'coaching,' this study determined that executive coaching was the least preferred approach because it was the least understood and least well-known by SPOs. According to Jones et al. (2018), executive coaching best suits those aspiring to higher management positions. It is described as a catalytic component for personal development and organisational change in dealing with greater complexity and new responsibilities. The findings indicate that the competencies recognised in the executive coaching literature are similar to those in clinical programmes (Day et al., 2017; Walker, 2004). For example, coaches need to have basic psychological skills and experience in supervision (Pekkan, 2018; Peltier, 2011).

Following a thorough review of the literature (Pekkan, 2018; Peltier, 2011), one can determine the key outcomes that differentiate executive coaching from other types of coaching. These are the facilitation of performance improvement (i.e., goal-oriented, results-oriented and practical), adult-learning, personal development/support, and unlocking personal potential. The activities that provide these outcomes result from a working relationship with an individual that generates a collaborative partnership and enables clear, unvarnished feedback and a short-term and practical focus.

This study highlighted that middle managers have authority but are not the primary source of power for managers. Although there is an inconclusive debate in the literature (Van Genderen, 2014) on whether coaches/managers can provide specific knowledge, this study suggests that SPOs expect sufficient knowledge from coaching experts. Such views revolve around the consultancy-based approach, which requires the technical ability to examine the organisation; understand its structures, organisational systems and dynamics; assess the nature of power and politics, isolate critical factors, apply related business practices, and develop creativity for practical solutions.

A consultant works with an organisation to help it build the organisational skills and competencies needed to achieve higher performance levels. This may include new IT

systems, HR processes, auditing, accounting or tax procedures, and new performance measures. On the other hand, the organisational facilitator focuses on development; it offers seminars, conferences and other activities that allow the organisation to focus on its development (Hermel-Stănescu & Svasta, 2014; Van Genderen, 2014). Helping SPOs to reach their full potential requires a ‘transformational partner’ or ‘organisational coach’ who does not tell them what they already know but walks with them and shares their learning experience as a guide, challenger and supporter. As highlighted in Chapter 1, subsection 1.2.1, p.4, the term ‘coach’ in this project did not refer to an ‘expert’ but a ‘facilitator’ of learning.

Furthermore, in Malta, there is no regulatory body for coaching, and anyone can be called a ‘coach’ without adhering to a set of rules or standards. The ICF, ECMC and the Association for Coaching (AC), among others, have recognised such underlying issues (Fontannaz, 2018; Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Tanskanen et al. (2019) point out that years of experience in leadership positions, methodical competence, recognised certifications, CPD activities, and the highest level of integrity are all elements that most coaches in the coaching community strive for.

Although most survey respondents misunderstood what coaching means and what it can offer to the MPS, SPOs in sectors see the concept of coaching as a return on investment (ROI) that emanates from coaching engagements and relationships through internal and external coaching initiatives. Broadly speaking and taken together, impacts, value, and ROI are all vital tools that programme managers could use to help them with their organization’s self study.

The results can be helpful for decision-makers in organisations, coaches and coaching clients, and their managers. Assessments of how often certain competencies are addressed for coaching can help decision-makers assess overall coaching efforts and organisational needs. Without undermining the customisation that represents a true strength of coaching, choices of targets, impacts, and business implications can target those involved.

Increasingly, the literature (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2020) speaks of organisations thinking more strategically about how coaching can add real value to their business by

considering the key strategic priorities, individual and collective leadership, and management style and capability. This has led to a growing interest in organisations' coaching culture.

In this study, nearly 70% of the respondents indicated that the complexity of the problems within the MPS makes them too difficult to solve on their own without resorting to external support. Some SPOs suggested that coaching should be done in-house, even if it can lead to a biased attitude. Numerous studies (Hastings & Pennington, 2019; Mofield & Phelps, 2021; Schalk & Landeta, 2017) confirm that internal coaching is well-established in global entities and that the approach is cost-effective. On the other hand, external coaching is much more comprehensive and can offer more challenging perspectives.

As Jones et al. (2018) suggest, the most effective use of coaching may be to use a mix of both internal and external coaching. The MPS undoubtedly may view internal and external coaching as two sides of the same coin. Above all, SPOs expect coaches who can clarify organisational goals for them and find the right solutions. This accords with the works of Moon (2020), who emphasised a collaborative, SF, results-oriented and systematic process in which the coach helps enhance the coachee's work performance, life experience, self-directed learning and personal growth.

### ***Coaching Practices Within MPS***

The analysis of this study suggests that some SPOs are implicitly already adopting a mentoring/consultancy approach supported by training and that some are explicitly and deliberately adopting a coaching approach. It appears from the literature (Connor & Pakora, 2017; Pedersen et al., 2021) that while coaching for skills often looks for specific behaviours that require little intervention (one to two sessions), coaching for performance is concerned with how leaders set goals, assess their progress to become experts in their fields, and overcome toxic behaviours. As we have seen in theme 3, subtheme 2, in DC, the focus is on personal development, where the coachee controls the entire process. When the goal is organisational change, the coach and coachee work together to move in a single direction (Korotov & Bernhardt, 2018).

Coaching for skills and performance is a significant phenomenon for healthcare respondents because of the patient-centric aspects (effectiveness) and the clinical and knowledge aspects (efficiency), including engagement, patient care, relationship management, patient monitoring, and values. Thus, skills and performance in the health professions outweigh the administrative aspect of the leadership role (Ghavidel et al., 2019). Although it may be an implicit but not stated fact, the healthcare sector has centuries-old traditions with a rigid medical model and hierarchical system. This means that skills and performance have a distinct advantage over personality development. According to Connor and Pakora (2017), skills coaching (SC) refers to specific skills needed by the coachee, while performance coaching (PFC) is an ongoing process that supports building and maintaining effective employee–manager relationships.

Like the healthcare sector, ICT SPOs viewed coaching for skills as the most preferred type. The ICT sector in Malta is a profession with ongoing innovations in the blockchain (Deloitte Malta, 2019) and artificial intelligence (AI) (Malta Independent, 2019) – industries that have been recently introduced. As the public service in Malta evolves during this digital age, it would be helpful for future studies to explore how coaching in this sector can offer a new path for future leaders. For example, the literature (Siau & Wang, 2018) shows a few technical improvements, such as a growth in the usage of AI and machine learning (ML) and mobile technology. These and other modern technologies, such as chatbots, are affecting coaching. According to a study published in 2021 by Chatterjee et al., technological advances enable coaches to provide real-time workplace-based feedback to analyse coachee performance-based on real-time data; to provide 24/7 help and guidance via chatbots and to offer pertinent information based on the coachee’s behaviour and activities.

E-coaching research is still in its infancy, but with innovative technologies constantly growing, it has almost unlimited potential to enhance behaviour-change interventions in ways traditional face-to-face coaching would not. While AI/ML cannot yet replace human-to-human connection, this field is developing rapidly (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2021). Researchers have shown that a combination of both AI and ML would complement the coach rather than replace their skills and abilities.

Respondents working in the finance sector preferred coaching for development and performance. This is because respondents in this sector seem to be influenced by government priorities related to their financial and fiscal well-being (MFIN, 2017). While DC encourages development and learning in the workplace, PFC is concerned with raising the coachee's level of competence in their respective role (Connor & Pakora, 2017). DC and PFC typically focus on personal and professional goals to help leaders align with their authentic selves (Ghavidel et al., 2019; Korotov & Bernhardt, 2018).

Coaching within the MPS can be effective for middle and senior managers who wish to improve their conflict resolution skills (Domain 1). However, this requires reflecting on their skills and behaviours (Domain 2). The outcome of the coaching can then be supported by a unique relationship aspect whereby SPOs engage in self-knowledge and self-exploration with their respective seniors to develop their general and professional skills and improve their sector's performance. This role is strongly supported by the literature and research-based studies (e.g., de Haan, 2019; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2021) and requires the knowledge to apply psychological reasoning skills (Domain 3). By evaluating this domain, one can determine if public officials are well-informed about the profession and the context in which they work. This approach allows conceptual thinking to determine 'why people do what they do' (Domain 4).

People who do not understand the concepts and benefits of coaching find coaching to be a time-consuming activity (Donaldson et al., 2019). Although coaching and mentoring can play a valuable role in organisations, the literature has not comprehensively discussed the barriers to coach. To fill this gap, this study aimed to address the barriers to coaching/mentoring as perceived by SPOs, as discussed in the following subtheme.

### ***Coaching and Mentoring Barriers***

In coaching, much of the talent lies in what a coach does; however, the coaching process is hampered by certain behaviours that hinder a good conversation. Simple attitudes, such as talking too much and wanting to be right, are some of the barriers. Other aspects relate to the coach's beliefs, such as wanting to be right or finding the

‘perfect solution.’ Coaches can overcome these behavioural boundaries once they become aware of them. This involves a three-pronged approach: (i) to become aware if anything a coach does or thinks is not functioning; (ii) once coaches recognise this, it would be advisable to change it; (iii) they might need to refocus their aim or behaviour or substitute it with something more beneficial. The key to avoiding these barriers to effective coaching is for coaches to develop an intuitive sense of when to do something and learn of the pitfalls. This awareness may then be developed by consciously noticing their own tendencies to adopt these behaviours.

The data analysis shows that most SPOs noted the lack of time and resources in their sector, followed by more than half of respondents concerned about OC. Many arguments for creating a coaching culture are similar to that of Sherman and Freas (2004), published in the *Harvard Business Review*; they discussed the benefits of a coaching culture and the problems it can help alleviate. According to these authors, many leading global companies find themselves on the journey from hiring external coaches to training internal coaches and ensuring coaching is part of managing and building the organisational processes and systems. This part of OC may be linked to the resources and costs allocated for training and development (e.g., remuneration and promotion policies). Coaching can be successful if senior and middle managers share ideas, learn from each other, and foster a collaboration that helps break down organisational silos. Most successful managers coach their subordinates in ways they are sometimes unaware of. According to Schalk & Landeta (2017), managers do not use coaching to the full extent, as an experienced coach does, but in partial aspects.

In this study, the least cited coaching barrier was ‘*resistance from senior management*,’ but a higher percentage (43%) of SPOs cited employee resistance as a coaching barrier. This shows that employees are more resistant to coaching than senior managers and provides a different perspective on OC issues within the MPS. Many SPOs may feel that coaching is a sign of weakness and an obstacle to the ‘just get it done’ mentality and that they can get away with not following up on their job performance.

Other barriers in this study were expressed in terms of public officials with excessive responsibility, over-commitment, and difficulty balancing job demands with other areas of life. Perhaps the manager or the coaching leader is not qualified for their role

or does not have the necessary coaching skills. They might not be willing or able to work with individuals' emotions. They may refer to the past and be guided by their own judgements and prejudices, or they might not understand or be able to deal with the relationship dynamics. The coachee, in turn, may not fully engage in the coaching process. Other issues could involve the top management – for example, forcing employees to sign up for coaching or when a coaching culture does not enable employees to try new behaviours.

More limitations included financial and technological issues, lack of professional guidance, lack of resources, lack of access to training opportunities, fear of failure, lack of motivation, lack of leadership, lack of management commitment to learning, and a reluctance to adopt Maltese culture-related coaching practices. In these instances, one might consider positive psychology, which encourages people to focus on the positive aspects of their life (Green & Palmer, 2018); thus, coaching should focus on identifying and enhancing the coachees' abilities. While specific components of positive coaching can help people accomplish goals, it is primarily intended to help improve their overall well-being and achieve a better balance in their lives (Passmore & Oades, 2022).

When SPOs were asked about the critical factors needed to develop a coaching/mentoring culture within sectors, 69% of respondents suggested '*addressing resistance to change*', '*aligning policies and procedures*', and '*developing internal coaches*'. Others with broader views suggested '*increasing leadership capacity/cadre*' across the three main sectors (healthcare, finance, ICT, and digital media). From the data of this study, it can be concluded that the barriers to developing a coaching culture within the MPS do not lie with senior management but rather at middle-management levels of the MPS organisational hierarchy.

### ***Coaching Relationships***

In this study, a coaching relationship was described by ICIs as '*an approach where all parties involved in the process communicate openly, specify needs and then make practical decisions based on that experience*' (p.180). This study is similar to that of Rocha and Gratao (2018) in that one of the main identified factors concerns the

involvement of coaches. The SPOs' data from this study suggests that the *'manager of the coachee'* initiates the coaching relationship in the workplace. The significance of this data shows there is a great demand for managers to act as coaches within the MPS. When managers/leaders act as coaches, there will be a cultural shift in the organisation: SPOs will see their superiors as coaches rather than enforcers. Trust in management will grow and, with it, employees' loyalty and commitment (Will et al., 2019).

Some authors (Cooper, 2018; Pawar et al., 2020) suggest that coaching relationships help leaders to focus on coordinated and systematic problem-solving techniques based on their integrity and competence. These features follow descriptions suggested by ICIs in earlier findings. When asked about the downsides leaders face in dealing with relationship issues in the workplace, ICIs argued that the coach's role is not to uncover the problem but to investigate how workable solutions could be transferred to the workplace. They said that most problems faced by managers are related to attitude problems. Other issues reported by participants included the managers' excessive sense of responsibility, over-commitment, and the challenge of balancing job demands with personal life. ICIs were then asked to identify the factors needed to strengthen the coaching relationship in the workplace. The majority commented on the *'quality of the coach,'* the *'reason coaching was first introduced in the first place,'* and the *'purpose of coaching.'*

Using the coded descriptions, SPOs described a coaching relationship in terms of (i) 'trust,' (ii) 'friendship,' and (iii) 'confidence.' ICIs described a coaching relationship in terms of (i) 'collaboration,' (ii) 'open communication,' (iii) 'co-operation,' (iv) 'needs assessment,' (v) 'effective decision-making,' (vi) 'sharing of experiences,' and (vii) 'feedback.' When these characteristics are compared with the online survey data, two similar components materialise - communication and feedback. Both components can be used in coaching. The literature (Le Comte & McClelland, 2017) confirms that these two coaching traits, along with others mentioned in this study, can enhance behavioural change in organisations and narrow the leadership skills gap.

John Whitmore argues that raising coachees' awareness and encouraging them to take responsibility for their responses are the two essential qualities of the coach (Whitmore, 2002). Whitmore's perspective relates directly to transformative

leadership, in which self-awareness and self-responsibility play a key role in coaching. Awareness involves becoming mindful of how one sees and interprets, hears and feels, deciding what is relevant, and being aware of one's own self-confidence without relying much on the coach's direction. The coach's role may be to raise and maintain the coachee's awareness of the areas they wish to improve.

Transformative learning is based on situatedness – in other words, learning from environmental, social and cultural factors to change behaviour (Lindeman, 1926; Pavlov, 1927; Piaget, 1929; Vygotsky, 1962; Watson, 1930). In the context of public leadership, this can be interpreted as a process through which individuals learn how to take responsibility in agile and performance-oriented leadership structures (Cauchi, 2012). A coachee can decide and then commit to those decisions by reacting and responding based on his/her free will. This contrasts with the approach when someone is commanded or coerced into responsibility. If the coachee does not take full responsibility, all the coaching leaders' efforts will be in vain. The coach need not be an expert, but s/he can encourage others and hold them accountable for their losses and gains. An adult-learning experience may provide significant insights into the strategies and processes that coaches can employ to help their coachees make a significant impact (Connor & Pakora, 2017). This approach seeks to use coaching to stimulate deep learning. It is based on several adult-learning theories – including andragogy (Latchem, 2019), reflective practice (Rucinski, 2020), and experiential learning (Heinrich et al., 2021) – which contend that adults learn by reflecting on their experiences.

According to Nadeem and Garvey (2020), coaching may be a learning strategy to cultivate goal-oriented, self-directed learners who rely on their experience to solve real-life challenges. DeCapua et al. (2018) proposed a transformational learning coaching paradigm that challenges the coachee's preconceptions. The present author suggests that coaching has become a tool in the increasing shift of organisations towards informal, self-directed learning. People aware of their own transformation consciously change and work towards changes in others or the organisation.

## 5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This analysis has aligned with the previous literature, where the majority of SPOs confirm there is a problem with skills shortages. Within the MPS, there are no coaching programmes for SPOs, and more than half of SPOs are underqualified for their roles. This study found that more than half of the SPOs found directive management approaches more effective than coaching. While the study acknowledges deficits in leadership qualities in higher positions within the MPS, the analysis of this study suggests that employees are more resistant to coaching than senior managers are.

Among many concepts and terminologies perceived by SPOs under the misnomer of ‘coaching’, this study determines that executive coaching was the least preferred approach. This is because it was the least understood and least well-known by SPOs. Maybe SPOs are still influenced by the traditional leadership style representing a boss-centric culture. Data analysis suggests that the barriers to coaching/mentoring are related to the sectors’ lack of time and resources and the OC.

Coaching can respond to the senior leadership skills gap by helping SPOs and senior managers to change their management style from command-and-control to a collaborative and participative style. Although coaching can be effective in certain areas, one must choose the right strategy for implementation and the proper time frame from the initial to the end stages of coaching. Thus, a comprehensive coach training programme would be required for success as part of better TM, leadership development and SP more generally. The conclusions of the study are drawn in the next and concluding chapter.

# Chapter 6: Conclusions

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*Success is not final.*

*Failure is not fatal:*

*it is the courage to continue that counts.*

—Winston Churchill

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter is divided into ten sections. Section 6.1 is the introduction to the chapter. Section 6.2 revisits the aims, objectives and research questions. Then, section 6.3 outlines the research contribution to knowledge and practice. Section 6.4 discusses the implications of this research, followed by the recommendations (6.5), future research (6.6), and research limitations (6.7). This chapter concludes with a personal reflection on this exciting journey in section 6.8, followed by insights on double-loop learning from a theoretical approach and coaching experience (6.9). This chapter concluded with a chapter summary in section 6.10.

## 6.2 REVISITING THE AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 6.2.1 Aims

The overall aim of this thesis was to determine whether coaching could be used as a professional learning opportunity (amongst other active forms of PD) to help reduce the significant gap in skills within the Maltese Public Service (MPS).

### 6.2.2 Objectives

**Objective 1:** Summarise the skills gap in the MPS and identify which subset of these might be addressed by coaching.

The skills gap issue in this study corroborates the findings of the 2017 and 2018 EC reports for Malta. In this study, almost 80% of SPOs in healthcare, finance, ICT and

digital media have recognised this issue. From the data, it can be deduced that the barriers to developing a coaching culture within the MPS do not primarily lie in upper management but in middle-management. This was shown by the cross-sectional analysis, which demonstrated that while SPOs engage in workplace coaching, they are still influenced by the traditional leadership style, which has a boss-centric culture.

Traditional leadership theories focus on the leader-follower relationship, where followers are responsible to leaders (Van Oosten et al., 2019). This style of leadership assumes that decisions are made through a logical process. Altering an organisation's culture is challenging but may be possible by revision shared meanings and interpretations. Top management is responsible for aligning an organisation's strategy and culture. While traditional leaders provide direction, guidance and coercion, coaching leaders rely on their ability to persuade, teach, and challenge employees (Rothwell, 2020). The MPS could move away from the traditional command, control and compliance paradigm and adopt a new management style based on inclusion, involvement and participation. The new way of managing might call for behaviours that make it easier for employees to do their jobs, learn and grow – in other words, coaching.

This study has associated the Maltese skills gap with management issues and development opportunities. Coaching can respond to these gaps by:

- Identifying organisational goals and developing talent expertise.
- Conducting a training needs analysis (TNA) for SPOs and seniors.
- Developing SP and leadership development programmes covering leadership skills and influence, managing teams, communication, decision-making, engagement and relationships, emotional intelligence, motivation, diversity and inclusion.
- Developing competencies related to various parts of intellectual and interpersonal skills.
- Preparing and equipping senior managers to oversee complexity and ethical issues such as nepotism, unfair favouritism and corruption.

- Conducting leadership assessments for predicting performance (selection and placement), evaluating performance (holding executives accountable and rewarding satisfactory performance), diagnosing performance gaps, and setting directions for improvement and career development. Such assessments may include interviews, cognitive tests, personality inventories, internal work processes, a Balanced Scorecard, individual goals with associated performance measures, and multiple-source surveys (360-degree feedback).
- Determining essential components of work behaviour, performance and results and linking these components to organisational and individual characteristics.
- Improving critical thinking amongst SPOs and seniors.

The analysis shows that most SPOs feel marginalised and, as a result, are less likely to participate in their development. Nepotism, corruption, and political appointments to the MPS play a role in this. For example, 63% of SPOs believe that '*unfairness in filling leadership positions*' is one of the main aspects of favouritism within the MPS. This study seems to be the first to compare SPOs' experiences, within coaching research on political corruption, nepotism and favouritism, since coaching literature has been silent on the issue. These three main components, indirectly linked to the skills gap, lead the MPS to appoint mediocre-quality workers.

This thesis developed the contention that successive governments have tried to politicise the public service by appointing people of trust to the higher echelons of the service (Briguglio, 2019). According to Maltese scholars, '... this is characterised by the intimate interactions of politicians with their constituents, who would trade their political loyalty in return for favours or posts in the public service' (Mullard & Pirota, 2008:133).

In Malta, the recruitment of heads of authorities under Article 15(2)(i) of the Employment and Training Services Act (today referred to as Jobsplus) follows Article 110(6) of the Constitution. According to this provision, public bodies may recruit staff by examination or public employment service.

This study suggests that more than half of SPOs act more like bosses than managers within sectors. One aspect of these claims is the traditional understanding of a boss as

an authority figure, meaning that managers are expected to solve problems independently and tell their subordinates what to do. They prefer a command-and-control approach to management. Added to this is a transactional culture of telling, bullying/mismanagement, low morale within the MPS, and poor service effectiveness. There is an assumption within the MPS that leaders *'do what they want'* because of *'... their political background'* – i.e., they are protected to the extent of their political affiliations.

The findings in this study follow the works of earlier Maltese authors, showing that a key problem dominating professional practice in various disciplines in Malta is the lack of skills and competencies of those holding managerial and leadership positions. This study confirms that most SPOs do not agree that all senior managers within the MPS are hired based on specific academic criteria.

**Objectives 2 and 3:** Establish what understandings of the different types of coaching already exist within the MPS and develop an understanding of how coaching is perceived amongst practitioners in Malta (Senior Public Officials (SPOs) and Independent Coach Instructors (ICIs)).

The concept of coaching was considered from different angles in this study. Coaching in Malta was said to be *'... in its infancy and suffers from a lack of clear standards;'* *'it is still at an early and conceptual phase,'* *'has not taken hold as a term,'* and *'needs to be actively promoted.'* Furthermore, 30% of survey respondents see coaching as *'a developing concept'*, and 30% agree that *'the power of coaching is clear'*; they consider coaching to be *'as mature as each coach'*. The other 40% view coaching as *'a way of teaching and learning'*. SPOs and coaches have agreed that coaching in the workplace offers fair value for money as job-coach education.

While this research found that 70% of SPOs were coached outside the MPS, the analysis of this study shows much confusion about what coaching is and what it can offer to the MPS. According to Gwyn and Cavanagh (2021), adventure education is a good way to think about coaching since it aims to push the boundaries and discover new territories and vistas. These authors further argue that adventure-based coaching

asks the participant to test his/her cognitive, behavioural and emotional competence and to influence change by inventing new behavioural responses to situations.

SPOs have sought private coaching without a clear understanding of how coaching works and expected that coaching would provide direct answers to their problems. Perhaps external coaches are not remarkably effective or not the only solution; however, they are the only source sought by SPOs to develop their coaching skills. Alternative interventions may include internal coaching, appropriate/ethical SP, recruitment and TD.

The results show that 69% of SPOs face problems that are too complex to manage on their own without external intervention. While there was scepticism about whether executive coaching would take root in the MPS or the private sector (an area where executive coaching may have been introduced), executive coaching was viewed as a type of investment that offers a return.

SPOs understand that they must pay for external coaching as part of their continuous professional development (CPD), but they also believe that external coaching is fair value for money. This view is somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, it was discovered that SPOs need self-funding for their CPD because the MPS offers only the senior management toolkit but not coaching. On the other hand, SPOs see external coaching as good value, as they feel more prepared for their coaching roles within the MPS. This inconsistency may be caused by an organisational culture (OC) that cares little about employee development.

**Objective 4:** Identify the competencies SPOs have already gained from coaching support.

According to Maltese SPOs, a professional coach should have '*communication skills*,' '*be actively engaged*,' '*have clear goals and commitment*,' '*be willing to change*,' and '*have emotional intelligence*.' In comparison, ICIs perceive a professional coach to be a competent person with '*leadership qualities*;' they will '*act with integrity*,' '*have confidence and inspire others*,' '*be committed and passionate*,' '*communicate well*,' and be '*decisive*'.

The analysis in this study concludes that the critical determinants required to develop a coaching/mentoring culture within MPS are: (i) managing resistance to change, (ii) aligning policies and procedures, and (iii) developing internal coaches. The coaching data suggests that organisations in Malta should strive for the following talent and coaching strategies: (i) leadership programmes that promote personal and professional development, (ii) performance measurement strategies (technical and non-technical), (iii) goal measurement, (iv) resource management, and (v) training.

The data also shows that 33% of SPOs yearn to strengthen leadership and communication skills in their sectors and to take on leadership roles. While 64% of SPOs felt that *'trusting one's instincts'* was a critical component of effective leadership, 37% of respondents felt that being available to connect with people was paramount. SPOs expect a coach to be honest and trustworthy in engagements, have practical communication skills, be open to confidential discussions, and provide constructive feedback.

### **6.2.3 Research Questions**

The study's research questions are answered as follows.

**RQ1:** 'Can coaching contribute to closing the management and leadership skills gap in the Maltese Public Service?'

Yes, it can. Coaching can respond to the senior leadership skills gap by helping SPOs, and senior managers shift their leadership style from command-and-control to promoting sensitivity to the most appropriate approach. Although coaching can be effective in certain areas, one must choose the right implementation strategy and the proper time frame from the beginning to the end of the coaching. Given the leadership and management challenges MPS faces and coaching's existing foothold in the service, this study presents evidence that coaching is a potentially valuable tool in solving these challenges.

When organisations try to figure out what type of training their employees need, they typically undertake a TNA. According to Garavan et al. (2012), there are four areas that organisations should consider: (i) identification (whom to develop), (ii) design (the competencies for developing people at their own pace throughout their careers), (iii) evaluation (measuring effectiveness), and (iv) organisational management support.

Many training materials, methods and techniques are available to prepare and equip leaders to improve their skills (Lacerenza et al., 2017; Visser, 2021). The findings of this study suggest focusing on areas which need improvement at the start of any development programme – for example, complexity, communication, relationship, influence, motivation, engagement, emotional intelligence, empathy, diversity, and inclusion. This study calls for more attention to corruption, nepotism and favouritism and how coaching can help reduce the impact of the skills gap within the MPS.

**RQ2:** ‘What awareness or understanding of coaching practices do Maltese SPOs and coaches have?’

The overall results confirm that there is much confusion about what coaching is and what it can offer the MPS. More than half of SPOs have considered directive management approaches to be more effective than coaching. I learnt from the literature (Szedlak et al., 2021; Van Wart, 2019) that when coaching is undervalued and not seen as an important process, it can become a barrier for the organisation due to cultural resistance. A crucial factor for the MPS is to build a coaching culture that helps employees understand the difference between coaching and other forms of professional development so that they can use their coaching skills in leadership development, employee engagement, communication skills, and teamwork.

The literature (Rimita et al., 2020; Weinzierl, 2018) suggests that the role of the leader today has evolved from traditional hierarchical leadership to a supportive rather than controlling role and that more managers/leaders are expected to develop coaching skills used in their daily interaction; shifting from a command-and-control mentality to teamwork, collaboration and teaching. Without standard certification or

accreditation for development programmes, however, it is difficult to determine whether enough training is being provided and whether it is effective.

According to Martino (2019) and Tsui et al. (2017), coaches have multiple roles in training and development. In the trainer's role, coaches are expected to show their expertise, while managers must bring strategic knowledge. Providing rich experiences through various means, including job rotation, mentoring, and insight into senior management activities within the MPS remains weak. While the literature on coaching (e.g., Mollman & Candela, 2018) and leadership development (e.g., Sun & Shang, 2019) have addressed coaching readiness in organisations, there is little agreement on models for assessing coaching capabilities. In 2015, Bachkirova and Smith developed a new model to assess coaching skills. This was used for accreditation in various UK public bodies like the Oxford Brookes University (OBU). Perhaps Malta can learn from this and develop an independent regulator to conduct assessments for those aspiring to senior coaching roles.

**RQ3:** 'What views do Maltese SPOs have about coaching as a form of professional development?'

The analysis shows that most SPOs feel marginalised and less able to participate in their development. The MPS has a strong culture of nepotism, corruption and political appointments, which exacerbates this problem. Leaders may engage in such behaviour to further their own interests, those of their group or organisation, or to undermine the interests of others (Beer & Irving, 2021). Despite the immense challenges posed by nepotism and corruption, and organisational issues such as lack of trust in sectors, bullying and mismanagement by senior leaders, coaching is already filling the gap created by the lack of professional development/leadership within the MPS. The findings from this study show that coaching can contribute positively to the transformation and development of public leaders.

While 63% of SPOs felt that '*trusting one's instincts*' was a critical component of effective leadership, 37% felt that being available to connect with people was paramount. A transformative leader listens to feedback and aims to develop their

followers by helping, guiding and coaching them to reach their full potential (Uslu, 2019). It is speculated that transformative leaders differ from traditional leaders because they have unique qualities, such as inspirational influence, which builds relationships and creates trust while imparting knowledge about operational areas. Development programmes such as coaching can have a tremendous impact on creating a culture that recognises the value of leadership talent (Brahm & Poblete, 2022; Xu et al., 2021). This could be supported by long-term internal coaching for a larger pool of emerging talent and a combination of internal and external coaching for senior leaders.

In this study, SPOs support the idea of participating in external coaching activities despite paying for their CPD. They believe that external coaching is good value for money. Articulating the required skills and competencies for critical positions within the MPS has the benefit of identifying any skills gaps, and through coaching, managers can identify and pursue personal and professional development goals. The only concern is that since the MPS has no further professional training development, SPOs will have to pay for outside coaching.

This analysis concluded that external coaching could support the MPS in developing a coaching culture to fill the skills gaps, but other internal interventions would also be needed, such as proper/ethical SP, recruitment and TD. The broader impact of these findings suggests the improved well-being of individuals in Malta, the development of a public leadership workforce, increased economic competitiveness, and improved infrastructure for coaching research and training.

## **6.3 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION**

### **6.3.1 Contribution to Knowledge**

The present thesis utilised several journals, including the *International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*; the *International Journal of Evidence-based Coaching and Mentoring*; the *International Journal of Coaching in Organisations*; and the *International Coaching Psychology Review*. Other journals that recognise specific issues on coaching include the *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal for Supervision and Curriculum Development* and *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* (Cooper, 2018; Jaworski et al., 2020). Few of the above

publications had research on both the coach and the coachee. Unlike earlier studies, the data in this study included diverse stakeholders (MPS, SPOs in health, finance, ICT and digital media, and ICIs

It has been shown that there is political corruption at the highest levels of public institutions in Malta. This is exacerbated by the multitude of ideological and social factions (*festa-partiti*) across the island (Watson, 2019). This study was the first to compare the experiences of SPOs and ICIs on the impact of nepotism and the politicised nature of leadership within the MPS, which indirectly links to the skills gap problem. Despite the challenges of corruption, nepotism, lack of trust, bullying and mismanagement of SPOs, coaching already seems to fill the gap created by the lack of professional/leadership development within the MPS.

The literature (Coupet et al., 2020; Foster, 2021) advocates a set of competencies related to collaborative governance that differ from traditional leadership competencies. A downside of collaborative governance is its potential to create clean collaborative governance by incentivising SPOs to fight wrongdoings. MPS may need to engage in coaching development programmes and monitor their overall impact on leadership and skills development. While the literature on coaching (Mollman & Candela, 2018) and leadership development (Sun & Shang, 2019) have acknowledged coaching readiness in organisations, there is little consensus on which models are used to assess coaching skills. As already referred to in subsection 6.2.3, the 2015 model developed at Oxford Brookes University is a step forward in terms of coaching standards for public bodies. This system assesses internal and external coaches to ensure they meet high enough criteria, allowing them access to different areas where these skills are needed most. Perhaps Malta can learn from this and establish an independent regulator to conduct assessments.

Public and Central Governments may need to pay more attention to the leadership development needs of individuals, using collaborative management as a framework. This study is a step in this direction, and the researcher hopes that others will help better understand which coaching and TD programme strategies are best suited to build and nurture leadership competencies for public leaders.

### **6.3.2 Contribution to Practice**

This work provides several useful implications for public service officials who want to start coaching and working as coaches and professionals in the field.

According to Smither and Reilly (2001), there was an urgent need to study public-sector coaching. Although there is extensive literature on public sector coaching elsewhere (see Bachkirova & Smith, 2015; Hofmann & Ogonek, 2018; Kuziemski & Misuraca, 2020), this study has contributed to providing professional foundations for further research on coaching in the public arena, with new embedded insights.

This research differed from other coaching research in that coaching was viewed as professional development to fill the gap in management and leadership skills within MPS. This research included middle managers aspiring to hold more senior roles. However, the lack of access to senior managers may have constrained the analysis; this calls for further research among leaders.

As a contribution to practice, this researcher developed a conceptual framework model, which is illustrated in Chapter 5 (p. 190), with a tentative GROW coaching model presented in this chapter (p. 236), which was developed as a conscious means of enhancing coaching learning and government practice within the MPS. Researchers will be intrigued by this topic since SPOs still adopt a directive leadership style. Perhaps, this thesis will change traditional perspectives. Understanding the positive and negative impacts is critical to advancing the coaching field. Thus, coaching can respond to the leadership skills gap by helping SPOs and senior managers shift their leadership style from command-and-control to a collaborative and participatory style. SPOs can create coaching policies and training for recruits and high potentials (HIPOs) to improve management and leadership effectiveness within the MPS. They can use this research to propose solutions to their seniors and stakeholders in different sectors. Other local or international researchers who wish to build on this research can also cite them.

For SPOs accustomed to tackling performance issues by telling people what to do, a coaching approach can reveal hidden problems, options, and new insights. SPOs can use coaching if they are qualified and experienced and should use a repertoire of

techniques in the field, as they would have much more knowledge about the organisation's culture. Skills can be learnt through critical reflection and social interaction. Some international scholars (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Yager et al., 1986) provided examples of positive and effective social skills that rely on (a) respect, (b) support, and (c) getting to know each other and building mutual autonomy.

Current research suggests that executive coaching can be viewed as a different activity that deals with qualities, skills and specialised tools. For example, a coach's lack of business knowledge can affect the credibility and trust-building of a coaching relationship. While the survey data in this study suggests that effective workplace relationships are based on trust, friendship and confidence, coaching effectiveness require (i) collaboration, (ii) open communication, (iii) co-operation, (iv) identifying needs, (v) making effective decisions, (vi) sharing experiences, and (vii) feedback. Establishing a model that identifies these essential components may help reduce the significant gap in skills within the MPS. Below I adapt Whitmore's GROW model (Figure 27) in the context of the MPS. This synopsis presents the key elements in a single model.

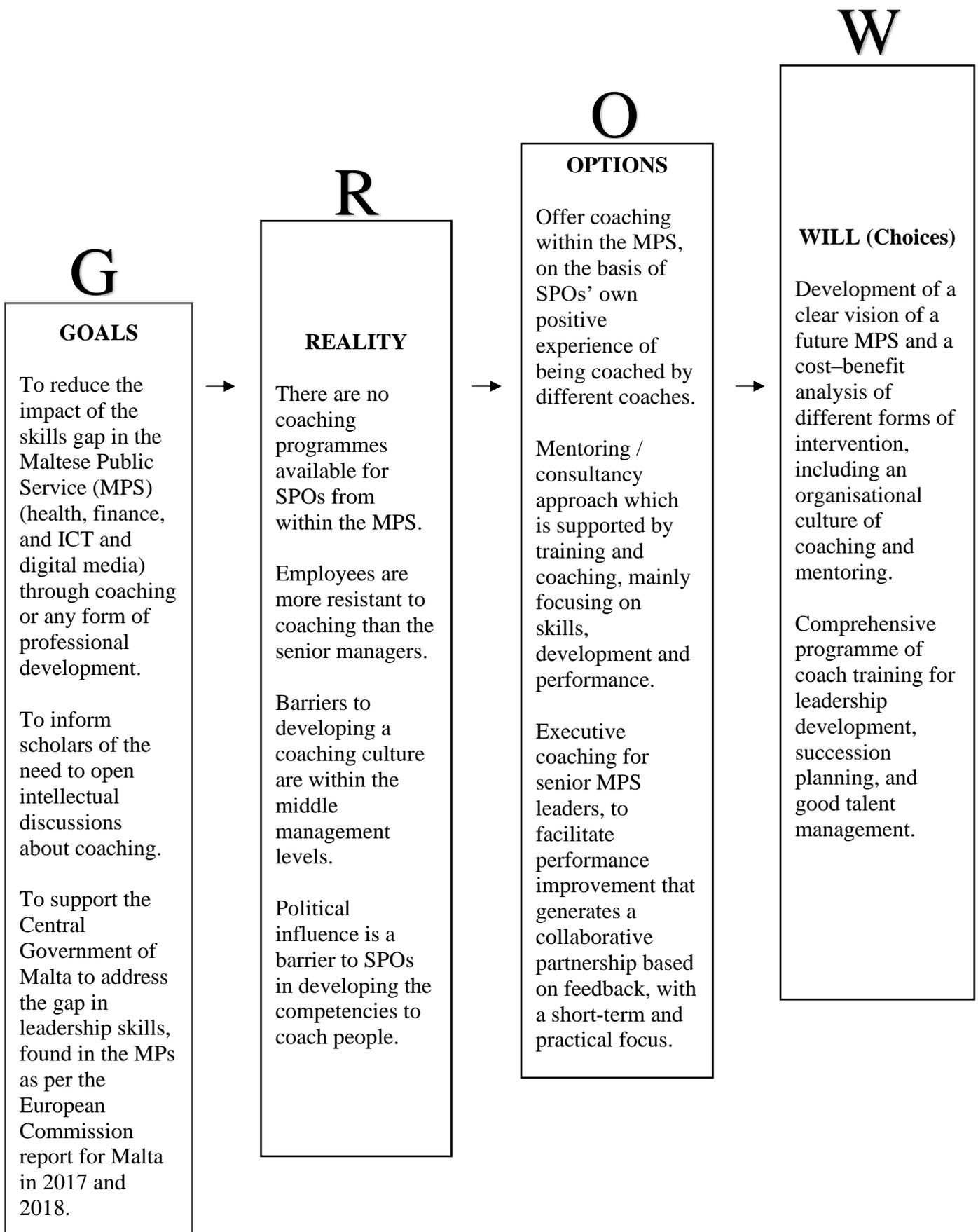


Figure 27: Tentative GROW coaching model for the MPS  
(Own Source)

## **6.4 IMPLICATIONS**

The only Ministry within the Office of the Prime Minister (MSD) micro-manages the MPS's day-to-day operations rather than providing clear policy direction and providing the MPS with the tools it needs to accomplish its work effectively. Most SPOs feel excluded and less likely to contribute to their personal growth. This is exacerbated by a transactional culture characterised by nepotism, telling, bullying, and mismanagement, resulting in poor employee morale and service effectiveness.

To address the most critical issues, managers must first acknowledge the challenges and then commit to addressing those challenges. An unclouded vision of a future MPS and a cost-benefit analysis of the different forms of intervention are required. Coaching could be a helpful tool among a variety of standard interventions to provide appropriate/ethical SP, recruitment and TD to discuss these issues; however, in Malta, coaching is still in its infancy, and there is much confusion about the goals, practices and styles of coaching that could be implemented. While there are well-established accreditation bodies for coaches worldwide, such as the ICF and EMCC, Malta has no recognised professional bodies. With all these challenges, how might the MPS move forward? The following section outlines the four key recommendations.

## **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MPS**

Whilst these recommendations are based on the informed opinions and experiences of Maltese SPOs and coaches, more robust research in this area would help confirm or reject many assumptions, recommendations and theories proposed in this study. This research has provided new insights and recommendations for future research on developing the coaching profession in Malta's public service. Whether external or internal coaches are deployed within the MPS, the aim is to support SPOs by helping them navigate change, manage transitions, and overcome organisational and human challenges that include organisational and managerial flaws, including political corruption, nepotism and favouritism.

### 6.5.1 Developing a Culture of Readiness

Coaching within the MPS can bring SPOs and senior managers together to improve public service values and bring about behavioural change. Strategic planning, budgeting and staff planning can be linked with each other. Whether an internal or external coach is used depends on several factors. One explanation is that internal coaches better understand the organisation's culture and climate and can better empower SPOs to be more productive in their workplace (i.e., by setting goals to remove organisation-specific barriers). Several authors (Christensen et al., 2020; Odor, 2018; Van Wart, 2019) highlight the features of a well-functioning coaching culture:

- Effectively using internal and external formal coaching resources.
- Considering the centrality of coaching in management and leadership styles.
- Integrating coaching into all HR and performance processes.
- Integrating coaching into all talent and development programmes.
- Utilising coaching in the way teams operate and perform.
- Sharing resources used regularly to help others flourish.
- Committing to individual and societal responsibility for the greater good.

This study shows that SPOs mainly have access to external coaches. A leader's psychological well-being may be safeguarded by psychological help from external coaching, so members of the organisation's hierarchy could reduce the stress of being aware of their own personal and professional growth struggles (Junge et al., 2020). The advantage of external coaching is that it provides professional expertise in coaching skills and ethics. However, there can be trust issues. For example, in a culture that encourages nepotism and mismanagement, coachees may find it challenging to trust external coaches and might prefer their own internal coaches.

Since it is impossible to foresee all situations, a helpful solution might be to include a clear statement in a formal statute in which senior officials declare that government leaders will tolerate no favouritism. This could have a better chance of being recognised than general prohibitions formulated in legislative acts, which rarely entail sanctions for violations.

Coachees of an external coach are more likely to have confidence in the coach's credibility and perspective than those who work with internal coaches, and the coaching is more likely to be meaningful. I suggest that the Central Government of Malta (CGM) should consider external coaching to equip SPOs with knowledge and skills and to use leadership approaches to inspire its employees to new achievements. By doing this, it could recognise their potential and encourage a change in leadership style. Developing an ethical workplace seems related to earlier work (Kets de Vries & Rook, 2018). Fleming and Taylor (2003) and Fielden (2005) suggest that the best leaders are those who either teach or embody personal values through coaching.

### **6.5.2 Goal setting and Transformation**

Goal setting and transformation have gained prominence in the coaching literature (McCarthy, 2020). While early research focused on understanding the 'how' of goal setting and goal achievement (O'Connell & Palmer, 2018), more recent research has focused on examining the 'why' (Cidral et al., 2021). Although there are several goal-setting models in Malta, the way public officials apply goal-setting within sectors is unknown. The planning and achievement of goals are central to many theories and methods that underpin coaching. Such theories include cognitive-behavioural and SF coaching (Ab Razak, 2020), systemic coaching (Ives et al., 2021) and self-concordance theory (Kramer & Petzoldt, 2022).

By setting goals, everyone involved will know if progress is being made and what changes are needed to ease the process. At a micro level, coherent pathways align the coach's and participants' perceptions and behaviours. This means understanding what goals they are working towards and how and why they are taking action to achieve them. This process works best with coaching engagements to achieve expected performance levels (Williams, 2019). There may also be improved metrics linked to accountability and superior levels of professional engagement (IPPR, 2013; Wilson, 2012).

In various sections in Chapter 2, there is a considerable body of literature on goals and goal setting. However, few articles describe a theoretical framework that connects goal theory with organisational coaching. Three notable examples are, first, the work of

Hawkins and Smith (2014), who described a transition as a process that helps the coached leader move to a higher-level of work. This transformation is triggered by an intense focus and commitment to change. Second, Gregory et al. (2011) argued that control theory (in which goals and feedback are two critical elements) could provide an essential framework for coaching to achieve goals and engage practitioners in a transformational phase by striving for their ideas and sharing common values. Third, Sue-Chan et al. (2012) examined the differences between goal setting and coaching and the influence of implicit fixed beliefs about ability and incremental beliefs on coaching outcomes.

Articulating an attractive vision and shared goals, and developing a sense of collective identity, were significant markers in this study. Many coaching programmes focus on setting outcomes, which are usually a direct statement of the desired outcome (Carden et al., 2021; Grant, 2020). Many coaching programmes concentrate only on defining precise SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely), and some goal-setting literature supports this approach (Ogbeiwi, 2021).

Through structured dialogue and networking, coaches can help their coachees deepen their insights and put them into action. In the literature, coaches are said to use a wide range of skills, including relationship and rapport building, matching and mismatching, understanding organisational systems' dynamics, designing personal transformational interventions, framing and reframing, and emotional engagement with the coachee and the issues at hand (Clutterbuck et al., 2019). The implication for the MPS is to develop an organisational strategy for leadership development grounded in transformative leadership skills and uses systematic transformational coaching designed to help leaders remove obstructive assumptions and beliefs that limit their potential. This can be achieved by involving internal/external coaches in developmental assignments with SPOs, to provide real support and encouragement throughout the process to professional performance, career, and organisational issues.

### **6.5.3 Talent Development and Succession Planning Approaches**

The study shows those employees in middle-management (scales 7 and 6) or above (scales 5 and 4), with higher perks and responsibilities, are on the verge of leaving the

MPS because there are no development programmes for those appointed to higher-level positions, and the pay is not attractive. Articulating the required skills and competencies for critical positions has the benefit of identifying skill gaps and training needs within the MPS. Nevertheless, the MPS must offer resources that support good leaders, and this begins with personal and professional development coaching aimed at helping SPOs develop into future leaders. Within the MPS, senior policymakers with the requisite experience could be trained as mentors to pass on their knowledge, opening the doors for less experienced officials and supporting those who understand the nuances of organisational politics and power structures. However, the data in this study suggests that SPOs rely on sparse knowledge beyond the policy issues recognised in this study. In a complex environment with critical talent gaps, an innovative succession strategy can help mitigate the risks of losing key employees by bringing new perspectives and promoting mobility.

#### **6.5.4 Training Coaching and Leadership Development**

Training is an essential element of employee development, so the MPS must ensure that the team is trained before taking on important roles. It should also emphasise the importance of evaluating other options, weighing the risks, and thinking about the consequences of decisions before making a final decision. Empowering this thinking will help SPOs make better decisions. Placing well-trained frontline workers in positions that enable them to make better decisions will help all public officials at various levels gain confidence and inspire enthusiasm for their jobs. This confidence can be spread throughout the MPS and would eliminate the bureaucracy that often impedes the progress of SPOs.

Training and development require monitoring, review and evaluation. A combination of training methods and techniques provides the key enabler for leadership development, strengthening OC and employee engagement, increasing employee productivity, and improving talent acquisition and retention – these are situational and institutional variables that make SPOs receptive to their development. Coaches have multiple roles in training and development; thus, understanding the process of coach development is essential to educating the next generation of coach leaders.

## **6.6 FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research is the beginning of a journey towards a better understanding of coaching in the MPS for management and leadership effectiveness. Future work could include access to senior managers and enriching the conceptualisation of coach–coachee engagement and relationships.

As suggestions for future studies, the researcher proposes the following questions: ‘Would it be effective if the CGM gave coaching in Malta the prominence it deserves?’, ‘What types of coaching models would work best in other sectors?’, ‘Do coaches understand that coaching can enhance their development as leaders?’, ‘What coaching capacity is necessary to develop in a corrupt culture?’. Furthermore, research to develop approaches and carry out a complete cost-benefit analysis of public participation in research would be beneficial. While methodologically challenging, it would be useful to undertake longer-term studies that measure public participation’s impact on key indicators such as MPS participant recruitment and retention. The difficulties of undertaking this future research might include a lack of initiative, lack of enthusiasm, and lack of leadership autonomy.

## **6.7 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

To date, no study has explicitly addressed coaching in the public service of Malta, so my understanding of coaching in Malta is limited to very few literature sources. Another limitation was the scarce literature on local research that could have enriched the study.

In addition, the gender balance in the study does not reflect the actual gender balance of the MPS. This might have distorted the study data. Another limitation concerned the availability of study respondents through the sampling process. Only a few respondents could participate, limiting the sample size and restricting access to those who met the criteria. For example, officials who were below salary scale 7 and did not hold middle or senior positions were excluded from the study.

The lack of access to senior managers of the MPS represented a significant limitation of the research. I tried to interview senior leaders within the MPS, but permission was

not granted for reasons of confidentiality and compliance, data integrity and privacy. There was also a political reason for this: ‘the recent murder of a journalist.’ Hence, senior managers did not want to be asked questions that could put them at risk. This lack of access to leaders constrained the analysis and calls for further research amongst leaders. Other sectors that might have enriched the study were also not included.

Study subjects may have provided answers that represent their ideal selves, or they might have described techniques and processes found in textbooks, which may not reflect their actual practice. Learning from coaches about how coachees are trained or how SPOs use coaching techniques in their leadership roles would have enriched my understanding of developing coaching in the MPS context.

SPOs were unclear about the coaching activities they undertake in the MPS, so they could make no authoritative statements. The strategies, styles and coaching contexts gathered in this study represent only some of the forms that coaching can take in the MPS. Also, since there are many concepts behind the term ‘executive coaching,’ there is a possibility that the questions/definitions were unclear and confusing for the respondents. There were no problems, however, with conceptual understanding in the pilot study. This is because those who volunteered for the pilot study already had some research knowledge and were familiar with such concepts.

It would also have been interesting to ask respondents which coaching models they use in their sector. Since I was unaware of their practices in coaching terms, this question was not asked. For me, this was part of the self-learning process.

As an insider working within the MPS, I have gained a deep understanding of the study’s context and drew interpretations that would have been unavailable to outsiders. Finally, the concluding section covers my reflection on this exciting journey, along with a reflection on double-loop learning, theoretical perspectives, and intervention approaches based on my experiences. The additional parts of the following section apply to practical experiences in the workplace.

## **6.8 PERSONAL REFLECTION**

### **6.8.1 Motivation**

I feel that my Doctorate of Professional Practice (DProf) project can open new lines of inquiry for this field, and I would like to use it to launch a fruitful research career, but I am also interested in wider development opportunities. Whilst I want to be an academic, I am happy to keep other options open. As a professional researcher, I want to gain enriching coaching experience and broaden my horizons locally and internationally. Overall, the DProf programme enabled me to transfer knowledge from academia to the workforce and to develop the knowledge I needed in my field of work.

The final stage of this project was challenging. Although the process was difficult and stressful, I can honestly say I have consistently loved my subject and have no regrets about undertaking this work. Going from a blank sheet of paper to writing-up was a real knowledge advancement. I admit that I do not know everything or have all the solutions, but I am keen to share my passion for this subject with a wider audience.

After my doctorate, I seek to publish and distribute my recommendations for future practice to the CGM. Long-term improvements might be discussed at a policy level, strategically planned, and implemented by raising the profile of public officials and Maltese coaches. I want to make a difference in this historically neglected area. My research can potentially contribute to the long-term evidence base for coaching practices. I hope to maintain a public-facing blog documenting my research and would also be keen to approach local educational institutions.

### **6.8.2 Personal Experience**

In my case, undertaking a DProf was an interesting journey. There are many options to meet the same goal, and each method has its own scientific merit, which is neither more nor less valid than the others. Being accepted by the University of Derby (UOD) for the DProf programme made me feel privileged. The process of social science research was new to me, and I needed new ways of thinking. I had paid little attention to ontology and epistemology before and had a lot to learn. During this professional programme, I was motivated to take up new training opportunities, so I sought advice from my supervisors to develop these skills. I found the academic experience

challenging to combine senior administrative duties with part-time research; this might be easier for full-time students. As an SPO within the MPS, a doctoral student and an insider researcher, this independent research project has taught me to reflect on organisational issues, gain new insights, and apply critical knowledge in the context of the MPS.

When I worked on this research, I was initially naive, but throughout these years, I have learnt a lot about what a PhD research process entails. During my studies, I learnt time management, the importance of prioritising, collaborating with others, giving oral presentations, being self-motivated, writing and editing effectively, and generating new thinking and learning. The experiences and reactions I encountered during this journey were both scary and exciting but were greatly appreciated.

I want to emphasise two qualities in my pursuit of high-quality research: (i) humility and (ii) courage. In this study, I tried to cultivate humility by listening to others, asking for help when needed, seeking feedback from others, being curious about blind spots, and considering the possibility of being wrong. I learnt from the experiences of others, overcame difficulties in challenging times (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic), and dealt with sometimes impossible research challenges.

For a research student entering this area, my advice would be to treat the research as a full-time job; to make well-informed decisions on avenues of research to pursue; to use all the resources that one can access; to read up on a variety of different sources, subscribe to an academic journal related to the subject, and make use of the university's library.

There are many things I could have done differently in undertaking this research. Perhaps I might have considered minimising the limitations I have identified in my research: for example, I might have also considered shifting and tightening my topic or design or perhaps used a different approach. I try to always learn from my mistakes and view them as challenges to overcome or opportunities to do better the next time, but I would not go back and change them because my experiences have made me who I am.

### **6.8.3 Problems**

The lack of data from the senior staff was a challenging factor. The main gatekeeper (Head of People and Standards – Governments HR) informed me that the approval was not granted for confidentiality and compliance, ethics, data integrity and privacy reasons. Then I realised a political reason for this, as explained in the study's limitations and other sections of this project. They may have seen me as a threat because I work in the public service and might have thought I was spying on them. These individuals have more influence on strategic policy decisions than other SPOs. This indicates that the organisation has no culture of learning or true self-evaluation and a lack of trust in the systems adopted by the CGM.

During my writing phase, I faced the dilemma of the length of my thesis. For example, in the literature review, I tried to include issues that were most relevant to the aims and objectives of the study. Where issues were important but less significant or seemed descriptive, I either included them in the appendix or deleted the text.

Another pressing problem I faced was making more sense of my insights. While I think I obtained useful raw material, I sometimes struggled to tell the story effectively because the data was scattered across different sections and had some unnecessary repetition. To reduce the problem, I re-read the topics and made necessary changes, outlined the most important aspects, and deepened my analysis by referring to the literature and creating signposts.

### **6.8.4 Achievements**

The main achievements of my research were threefold. I was first recognised by Maltese and international scholars as an academic researcher on coaching within the public sector environment. Second, having identified the skills gap within the MPS, which can be addressed by coaching and mentoring interventions, amongst others; and third, having part of my research published by Emerald.

The strongest parts of my work are: (i) the idea that public service leaders need to move away from direct acceptance of a command-and-control approach and turn to coaching as a form of professional development; and (ii) this study offers insights into

issues of organisational and managerial failings, including the methods through which coaching might be developed in a corrupt culture.

### **6.8.5 Future Outlook**

The people who might be interested in my work are knowledge users (including coaches, coaching students, researchers, coaching educators and supervisors), policymakers, organisational sponsors, and possibly clients interested in learning more about the coaching process.

I feel this doctoral project can open new lines of inquiry for this field, and I want to use it as the foundation for a fruitful research career. I intend to go to workshops and conferences abroad organised by professional practitioners. In addition, I expect my leadership values/awareness to change over time, so I hope to interact with many people, as I can use their expertise to address ethical and corruption issues. My leadership and coaching values within MPS are influenced by technological advances, which I hope will help me support the organisation's overall performance.

## **6.9 DOUBLE-LOOP LEARNING IN MY WORKPLACE**

From an academic perspective, scholars can use double-loop learning to obtain insights with a high-level of actionable validity. Such research opens new perspectives that relate to their research study. The essential framework for this process can be found in the work of Argyris and Schön (1978). Double-loop learning aims to improve action by learning from experience (Williams & Brown, 2018).

When I joined the Research Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) as a Head of Research, the CGM faced problems with productivity and the mediocre quality of research projects assigned by top management. The Research Unit had been hiring and demoting employees for five years due to a lack of sufficient skills to perform various tasks within the same Unit. The Research Unit has also undergone several changes in terms of appointments. As Head of Research, I examined the areas of culture and the recruitment process and looked for areas where improvements could be made. I discovered that staff did not last long after being hired because although there was high

occupational role integration, there was low job satisfaction. The connection between the junior and senior staff in OC was rather tenuous. Although such trust was challenging in an environment of high staff turnover, younger employees focused on their tasks, while older workers were closely supervised and trusted to complete their duties efficiently.

When I asked older employees about the Research Unit's working and recruiting culture, they said this was how things were done, and nobody complained. Meanwhile, other stakeholders tried to take over the Research Unit, but the mediocre quality and productivity exceeded the extent of the decrease in budget costs. The Unit had increased its training and recruitment costs; however, it had also suffered significant losses. My findings revealed there were issues with hiring and retention policies and with rigid OC.

### **6.9.1 Theoretical Approach from the Researcher's Perspective**

Here I outline my approach from a theoretical perspective and evaluate double-loop learning in greater detail. I challenged the existing method by proposing alternative approaches to the hiring process and towards forming company culture. First, I recommended that the Unit should assess its performance gaps. Second, I asked experienced senior staff to set up internal learning programmes and procedures. These programmes included apprenticeships, leadership development, technical skills training, teamwork and interpersonal skills. I recommended that the Unit hire interns and assign them to short-term projects under the supervision of a senior manager. The junior staff were given medium to long-term projects to ensure their job security and to help generate a more positive and cohesive OC.

The internal learning programmes aimed to encourage employees to improve their skills whilst supporting the MPS to train them in areas where they felt gaps were present. In terms of OC, I recommended that the company engage more with the experiences of its employees. Thus, workers who felt satisfied and supported by the MPS were motivated and engaged. Participants connected to their job and wanted to do more exhibited increased performance levels.

After the Unit put the policies into practice I recommended, the CGM has achieved a remarkable improvement in productivity from both a quality and efficiency standpoint. There has also been a dramatic rise in employee satisfaction, shown by the increased employee retention rate over the past two years. Employee retention has been enhanced through increased job security and engaging with their experience at a deeper level and more structured fashion. Employees working in this area feel motivated to participate in the internal training programmes and processes. They can show their skills with confidence, knowing they will have support for complex interventions. The connection between seniors and juniors has also developed to a significant extent. The Unit can internally recruit for open managerial positions to train its staff. If the Research Unit needs new employees, it can hire interns with basic skills for set tasks, thereby reducing the additional costs of training new employees.

In the aftermath of my intervention, the experienced seniors have committed themselves to greater professional development. They now support junior staff in fulfilling tasks and motivate their subordinates to achieve top performances. Introducing programmes such as internships has helped the Research Unit equip its new employees with the skills needed to carry out various research projects by bridging the skills gaps between existing and potential employees. This people-centric approach made employees feel like part of the organisation, which has been highly beneficial from a motivational standpoint and has transformed the organisation. The MPS's support has also greatly assisted management in a culture where failure was not reprimanded but viewed as an opportunity for personal and professional growth.

### **6.9.2 The Coaching Experience**

Although the intervention, as described above, had advantages, it was also characterised by some flaws. One of this intervention's weaknesses was the inability to link theoretical concepts to real-life situations. For example, this intervention did not include aspects of ROI. Perhaps upper management could have updated the Research Unit on how ROI can determine the Unit's success rate in terms of productivity and delivery.

Coaching has always been an interesting area I have sought to explore throughout my professional career. However, my perspective on coaching changed after completing my research. As an inside researcher, I always believed I could change the way people think by engaging them in coaching interventions. At first, I thought that coaching was just creating a vision for someone to set and achieve goals, but it was more than that. I realised that coaching requires thorough preparation for coaching readiness, from OC to team building. This research has taught me how coaching can help professionals choose or change careers, set goals, and overcome challenges. By continuing to learn about coaching, I believe I can help others achieve their goals and create lasting change in their personal and professional lives.

## **6.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The concluding chapter of this DProf thesis again addressed the aims, objectives and research questions and summarised the main findings contributions of the research to knowledge and practice and discussed research implications. A set of recommendations for MPS has been proposed, along with highlights on potential future directions for related research. The conclusions drawn from this study support the original research objectives and demonstrate a thorough understanding of the topic within the public service arena. This chapter concludes with a personal reflection and insights about double-loop learning covering the theoretical aspects and the researcher's coaching experience.

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# Appendices

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Appendix A	GDPR Principles and Research Data: Code of Conduct on Data Treatment for Research Purpose
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**Appendix A**  
**GDPR Principles and Research Data**  
**Code of Conduct on Data Treatment for Research Purpose**



Appendix A - GDPR  
Principles and Research

**Appendix B**  
**EC Working Document Reports**



Appendix B (i)



Appendix B (ii)

2017-european-seme2018-european-seme

## **Appendix C**

### **Facets of Coaching Discipline**



Appendix C - Facets  
of Coaching Disci

**Appendix D**  
**Key Roles within the Maltese Public Service**



Appendix D - Key  
Roles within the Ma

## **Appendix E**

### **Talent Conceptualisation**



Appendix E - Talent  
Conceptualisation.p

## Appendix F

### Good practices in countries adapting to changing skill needs



Appendix F - Good  
practices in countrie

## **Appendix G**

### **Academic and Practice-Base Coaching Journals**



Appendix G -  
Academic and Practici

## **Appendix H**

### **Leadership and Coaching Theories**



Appendix H -  
Leadership and Coa

# Appendix I

## ICF Sample Coaching Agreement



Appendix I - ICF  
SampleCoachingAgr

## **Appendix J**

### **The Reflection Phase on Interpretive Research and Mixed-Methods**



Appendix J - The  
Reflection Phase on

## **Appendix K**

### **Evaluation Method**



Appendix K -  
Evaluation Method.i

## **Appendix L**

### **Ethical Values**



Appendix L - Ethical  
Values.pdf

## **Appendix M**

### **Letter of Approval of Doctoral Research**



Appendix M - Letter  
of Approval of Doct

## **Appendix N**

### **E-mail invitation to Senior Public Officer (SPOs)**



Appendix N - Email  
invitation to Senior

## **Appendix O**

### **E-mail invitation to Independent Coach Instructors (ICIs)**



Appendix O - Email  
invitation to Coach I

**Appendix P**  
**Informed Consent**



Appendix P - Private  
Notice and Consent

**Appendix Q**  
**NVIVO 12 Screen Shots**



Appendix Q -  
NVIVO 12 Screen Sh

**Appendix R**  
**Published Works**



Appendix R -  
Published Works.pd

## **Appendix S**

### **Online Questionnaire**



Appendix S -  
Online SurveyMonkey

## **Appendix T**

### **Interview Guide**



Appendix T -  
Interview Guide.pdf