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1 **Executive Coaching and National Culture in the United Arab Emirates: An**
2 **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

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4

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6

7

Abstract

8 **Objectives:** *This study explores the interaction between national culture and coaching*
9 *methods that executive coaches use in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The objective is to*
10 *develop understanding regarding whether executive coaches varied methods or approaches*
11 *depending upon a coaching recipient being an Expatriate or a UAE National citizen.*

12 **Design:** *The research took place in the UAE, using semi-structured interviews with four*
13 *participants. The participants were executive coaches with experience and understanding of*
14 *different approaches and methods used in coaching psychology practice.*

15 **Methods:** *A qualitative method of data collection and analysis, Interpretative*
16 *Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), was used to examine the lived experience and making*
17 *sense of rich individual narratives. The double-hermeneutic approach of IPA generated*
18 *understanding via interpretation of the participant's perceptions.*

19 **Results:** *Cultural Values, Business Environment and Approach & Methods were three themes*
20 *that emerged from the study. National Culture is a significant feature of life in the UAE and*
21 *is omnipresent in the complex, multicultural business environment and manifests itself in*
22 *differences of cultural values and dimensions. Whilst national culture is important, it is only*

23 *one of many layers that shape an individual. Participants prioritise and customise their*
24 *coaching approach based upon the coachee as an individual and their current contextual*
25 *situation. Only small differences are identifiable in the utility of certain coaching methods*
26 *due to national culture, however, the approach to coaching is adjusted to address higher*
27 *expectations of direction, different motivational factors, different value systems and the*
28 *higher emphasis on relationships and trust amongst Emiratis.*

29 **Keywords:** *Coaching psychology, executive coaching, culture, United Arab Emirates,*
30 *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).*

31

Introduction

32

33 The current research attempts to bridge a gap in existing literature regarding the impact of
34 national culture on approaches and methods used in executive coaching. The aim is to
35 leverage the multicultural business environment of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to
36 develop understanding of this phenomenon. The study analysed the lived experiences of
37 executive coaches working with UAE National citizens and Expatriates, seeking to
38 understand if coaches alter their coaching approach and methods, such as cognitive
39 behavioural, psychodynamic, personal construct, strategic, or positive psychology depending
40 upon the nationality of the coachee.

41 Culture can be framed as the collective and individual programming separating people from
42 different groups (Hofstede, 1988), or more lucidly as how groups solve problems and
43 reconciles dilemmas (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997). National culture is an
44 important influence over organisational practises and values (Hofstede, 1991), and evident in
45 the UAE and across the Arabian Gulf where family-oriented business relations and Islamic
46 cultural values distinctively shape the business environment (Metcalf, 2006). This
47 dominating influence of local culture over organisational practises and values pervades
48 despite the dependence upon a 90% expatriate workforce (UAE Interact, 2010) represented
49 by over 200 nationalities (Abouzeid, 2008). The omnipresent influence of UAE cultural
50 values in the business environment, despite the high percentage of foreign employees can be
51 somewhat attributed to the propensity for senior roles in business units, boards and
52 committees to be staffed by UAE Nationals.

53 Hofstede's socio-cultural, anthropological research provides a framework to relate national
54 cultural values to workplace practise. Whilst observing that individuals only adhere to the
55 culture of their nation in varying degrees, culture does set limits on normative behaviours,

56 thus pressuring individual conformity to societal expectations. Whilst Hofstede's original
57 dimensional work did not cover the UAE explicitly, the categories of; power distance,
58 uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity form a useful
59 reference. Such a simple framework can lead to stereotypical assumptions in coaching
60 (Passmore, 2013), however, coaches can mitigate this by taking steps to recognise, accept,
61 adapt, integrate and leverage cultural differences; (Rosinski, 1999). Additionally,
62 research-based prescriptive motivational approaches to cross-cultural coaching pose that
63 typical coaching psychology techniques can be applied, but adjusted for cultural values and
64 motivational factors (Coults, et al. 2011).

65 Whilst coaching has emerged as an important, growing leadership practise; so far it has
66 assumed a North American and Western European worldview that doesn't hold universally
67 (Rosinski, 2003), and could be harmful in different cultural settings, such as more
68 collectivistic societies (Hofstede, 1993). Many executive coaches operating in the UAE are
69 North American and European, thus encouraging consideration of how false assumptions
70 based upon stereotyping can distort communication (Guirdham 1999). Cultural diversity
71 presents challenges to practice that are seldom considered in writings of coaching, however
72 Rosinski and Abbot argue that culture is an omnipresent influence that presents opportunities
73 to harness when coaching (Rosinski and Abbot, 2006). Rosinski's Cultural Orientations
74 Framework builds on the work of eminent interculturalists, developing a common language
75 to discuss culture and a framework of categories enabling integration of culture into coaching
76 (Rosinski, 2003). More recently the Universal Integrated Framework (UIF) was developed
77 from a critical review of a range of coaching methods, forming a cross-cultural coaching
78 method underpinned by psychological learning theory (Law, et al, 2007), and aligned with
79 the British Psychological Society definition of coaching psychology (Palmer and Whybrow,

80 2005). The UIF integrates various coaching psychology methods, such as cognitive
81 behavioural, gestalt techniques, narrative and existential approaches (Law, 2013).

82 David Peterson of PDI notes that coaching occurs at individual level, with culture a social or
83 group level phenomenon, arguing that despite the potency of culture as a force shaping
84 behaviour and identity, there are many other factors to consider. As culture is an
85 unpredictable and unreliable factor in determining individual character, the role of a coach is
86 to understand the individual regardless of what shaped them, (Peterson, 2007).

87 The literature informs of the importance of remembering that an individual is not the culture,
88 reflecting a basic psychological observation that individuals differ more within groups than
89 groups differ from each other (Palmer & Arnold, 2013). Although national culture is likely to
90 play a role in defining an individual's world view, many things shape the character, values, or
91 behaviour of any particular individual, such as; personality, experiences, political, family,
92 social, educational and economic background. Therefore, assumptions regarding the extent of
93 national cultures' influence on individuals can be ill-informed. However, when working
94 across cultures, cultural knowledge and sensitivity is required (Donnison, 2008).

95 This dynamic, multicultural backdrop, combined with the lack of research of cross-cultural
96 coaching in the UAE provides a rich research opportunity at the intersection of culture and
97 coaching psychology. In addition to growing the body of emerging theory in an important
98 topic, an improved understanding of whether approach and/or methods are varied potentially
99 identifies optimisation opportunities for coaching programs, such as in selection, matching
100 coach and coachee, tailoring programs and managing issues that arise in coaching
101 interactions.

102 As the research is somewhat philosophical in nature and subsequently utilises qualitative
103 research methodology, no hypothesis or secondary research question was proposed.

104

Methods

105 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allows for deep analysis and interpretation
106 of personal experiences and perceptions of participants rather than objective account
107 formation (Smith and Osborn, 2003). Therefore IPA is well suited to the small available
108 population size and idiosyncratic subject matter. The semi-structured interview format
109 enables engagement in conversation, probing relevant, important areas (Smith, 1996). IPA
110 combines the theoretical orientations of phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography in an
111 interpretative overlay of how individual experiences appear to others. This expression of
112 double-hermeneutics (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012) is particularly appropriate, allowing the
113 richness and complexity of human sense making in emergent situations (Guba and Lincoln,
114 1994).

115 **Participants**

116 Due to the rich subject matter, small population of suitable participants and depth of
117 immersive analysis required with IPA, the research gathered input from four participants.
118 Whilst noting sample size as contextual, the research adheres to guidance of between three
119 and six participants for IPA (Smith, et al. 2009), enhancing quality by analysing fewer
120 participants in greater depth, rather than shallower, descriptive analysis that can result from
121 more participants (Reid, et al. 2005).

122 Participants were purposively selected, fulfilling the criteria of being UAE based, expatriate
123 executive coaches, with experience and understanding of coaching psychology methods.
124 They were recruited through the network of the researcher and all are experienced in
125 coaching executives within prestigious organisations in the UAE.

126 **Equipment**

127 Interviews were recorded using a digital sound recorder, anonymised and transcribed.

128 **Procedure**

129 After having received approval from Heriot Watt University Ethics Committee, participants
 130 were contacted directly, the background of the research explained, example interview
 131 questions sent in advance, permission sought and consent forms signed. Data was collected
 132 from individual, semi-structured interviews of between 40 and 80 minutes in Abu Dhabi and
 133 Dubai, UAE in December 2016. The interview approach aimed to stay on target whilst
 134 remaining flexible and conversational (Ruben and Ruben, 1995).The conversation was
 135 broadly framed around the questions in Table 1.

136 **Table 1. Interview Questions:**

Questions for Coaches:		
	Main Questions:	Additional Questions:
Questions for Coaches:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me about your experience of coaching in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What kind of coaching interventions have you led in the UAE? ▪ Who is it typically initiated by and why? ▪ What were the main challenges you were addressing through these coaching interventions?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talk to me about the typical coaching process that you go through? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is your style of interaction? ▪ What (if any) coaching psychology methods do you use? ▪ What frameworks and tools do you typically use? ▪ Why do you select these approaches? ▪ Are these approaches different to what you would employ in other countries? ▪ Do you consciously use different methods depending upon whether the coachee is Emirati or expatriate?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How effective do you think coaching is in the UAE? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you feel that you achieve the stated aims? ▪ Do you feel that your coaching is as successful in the UAE when compared to that provided elsewhere? ▪ Has the topic of national culture arisen during coaching in the UAE?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you feel that national culture plays a role in coaching in the UAE? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If so, what role and how does it play out? ▪ Your culture or theirs? ▪ If not, tell me more about that ▪ Was it a factor in your choice of methods?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ With hindsight, would you change your approach or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you wish went better? ▪ What would you do differently if repeating the coaching now?

methods?	
▪ Do you have any other thoughts or insights on coaching practise in the UAE?	

137

138 **Analysis**

139 IPA involves several stages of data analysis, moving the researcher from identifying the
140 uniqueness of participant perspectives, to what is shared across participants, making meaning
141 in a particular context (Cooper, et al. 2015). Recordings were listened to and transcriptions
142 read multiple times, immersing the researcher in the data, followed by textual analysis with
143 notes made on important points from an individual participant’s perspective. These notes
144 were transformed into emerging themes and lifted to higher levels of abstraction whilst
145 remaining grounded in the text. Themes were coded and connections sought, before a table of
146 themes was produced. This was followed by a detailed, interpretative examination of the data
147 through the lenses of the themes, connections and groupings (Smith, et al. 2011). Every stage
148 was repeated for each participant, returning to the beginning when new themes emerged from
149 later participants and when themes were consolidated and merged into a final master table of
150 themes (See Table 2). This intense, iterative, yet rewarding process of analysis continued into
151 the write up of the results and discussion.

152

153

154

155 **Table 2. Abstraction Leading to Final Master and Sub-themes**

<u>Master and Sub-Themes</u>	Coach # 001	Coach # 002	Coach # 003	Coach # 004
------------------------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------

<u>Cultural Values</u>				
Cultural Dimensions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Different Value Systems	✓		✓	✓
Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓
<u>Business Environment</u>				
Significance of Cultural Dynamics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Challenge of Multicultural, Transitory Environment	✓	✓	✓	✓
Motivational Factors	✓	✓		✓
Culture is One Layer of Many	✓	✓	✓	✓
<u>Approach and Methods</u>				
Consistent Application of Methods	✓		✓	✓
Customise for Individual and Context	✓	✓	✓	✓
Address Culture Directly / Early	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cultural Understanding and Adaptation	✓	✓	✓	✓

156

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Results

160 The narrative analysis from the participant interviews resulted in the emergence of

161 sub-themes, subsequently revealing three superordinate themes (See Figure 1);

162 ▪ Cultural Values,

163 ▪ Business Environment,

164 ▪ Approach & Methods.

165 Figure 1. Sub and Superordinate Themes

166

Sub-Themes

Superordinate Themes

167

168 Cultural Dimensions
Different Value Systems
169 Relationships



Cultural Values

170

171 Significance of Cultural Dynamics
Challenge of Multicultural, Transitory
Environment
172 Motivational Factors
Culture is One Layer of Many



Business Environment

173

174 Consistent Application of Methods
Customise for Individual and Context
Address Culture Directly / Early
Cultural Understanding and Adaptation
175



Approach & Methods

176

177 **Cultural Values**

178 The first superordinate theme of Cultural Values consists of three sub-themes (See Figure 1);

- 179 ▪ Cultural Dimensions,
- 180 ▪ Different Value Systems
- 181 ▪ Relationships

182 All participants talked of cultural dimensions, stating the impact on the coaching process,
183 both explicitly and implicitly;

184 *“power distance is much more acute in this region”* (004)

185 Participant 001 also refers to the Hofstede dimension of power-distance;

186 *“something that I notice oftentimes come up when I’m working with gulf nationals, is the*
187 *whole notion of power distance... ...we do have to recognise that meritocracy and shared*
188 *responsibilities is not a cultural norm”* (001)

189 Describing a direct impact on the coaching dynamic resulting from high power-distance;

190 *“I find that high power distance automatically places the coach in a role of authority,*
191 *something that doesn't fit with classic global methodologies around coaching”* (001)

192 Similarly, Participant 002 experienced expectations of playing the authority figure in the
193 coaching relationship;

194 *“I asked if we were to work together, what do you think we should work on. She replied to*
195 *say, isn’t that your job?”* (002)

196 The expectation of direction and of the coach to play a lead role is also described by
197 Participant 001;

198 *"I once worked with an Emirati CEO who said during our very first session: "I hired you to*
199 *give me answers - not to ask me questions!"*" (001)

200 Participant 004 highlights impacts related to the Hofstede dimension of uncertainty avoidance
201 (Hofstede, 2001);

202 *"I do think that when it comes to confrontation, people will move away from confrontation*
203 *here"* (004)

204 Providing a direct example of the impact on coaching conversations;

205 *"here you almost get the feeling that people want you to come off the accelerator and put on*
206 *the brake and you see a visible relief when you do those sorts of things."* (004)

207 Participant 001 spoke passionately of differences in value systems between UAE Nationals
208 and Expatriates. Firstly in terms of consciousness of values;

209 *"it's a very values driven society and I think that there is a consciousness around values here*
210 *that I don't find so much when working with people from other parts of the world"* (001)

211 Then with examples of differences in the values;

212 *"the value of commitment is different from what I would see when I'm working with people*
213 *from western countries"* (001)

214 All participants referred to the importance of relationships, family and trust to UAE Nationals;

215 *"of course family matters, it's hugely important to the Emiratis."* (002)

216 Participant 001 elaborates, relating individualism-collectivism to the fear of losing face;

217 *"Relationship is very important here. The need for love and belonging, it shows up*
218 *everywhere. Wanting to be part of and be accepted by my community, my family, that is such*

219 *an important piece here. So the fear of losing face is of course coming from that place.*
220 *Whereas expats, westerners, we are, we can pretty much carve our own lives to the extent*
221 *that we are individualistic, they only exist because of the collective. It's a big difference."*

222 (001)

223 The theme of saving face continues with Participant 003 describing a dimension that would
224 necessitate judgement from the coach on approach;

225 *"There will be some who know they need help and even though they need to save face, they*
226 *would prefer to lose face with their coach so that they can save face outside"* (003)

227

228 The importance of trust was explicitly stated by all, with a temporal implication also
229 emerging;

230 *"Trust is important; don't do anything different in terms of having faith in the integrity of the*
231 *coaching methodology that I have set up front"* (004)

232 *"I terms of my ability to build... it takes longer. That is for sure."* (004)

233 *"I think it comes down to intent vs content. If people believe that you are on their side, if they*
234 *trust you, you can pretty much say anything."* (002)

235 *"I would say that the success of the assignment is actually very much depending upon can*
236 *you establish that relationship and can you build that level of trust with someone"* (001)

237 Participants observe significant differences in cultural dimensions and values, particularly the
238 importance placed upon family and relationships. This impacts the coaching approach,
239 content and nature of the coaching conversations.

240 **Business Environment**

241 The second superordinate theme of Business Environment consists of four sub-themes (See
242 Figure 1);

- 243 ▪ Significance of Cultural Dynamics,
- 244 ▪ Challenge of Multicultural, Transitory Environment,
- 245 ▪ Motivational Factors,
- 246 ▪ Culture is One Layer of Many

247 All participants commented on the omnipresence and major impact of culture in the UAE
248 business environment;

249 *“Culture is a huge part of it”* (002)

250 *“Culture, it’s something that’s got to be known and treated with great respect”* (004)

251 Participant 002 agreed on culture’s importance, speaking passionately about it being one
252 factor of many and potentially overplayed.

253 *“Yes I think it is an aspect, an important aspect, but not the only aspect.”* (002)

254 *“I think in this multicultural environment that we work in, we run the risk of thinking that
255 culture outranks everything else, and it doesn’t.”* (002)

256 All participants referred to the UAE’s challenging, multicultural business environment.

257 Participant 001 describes environmental complexity and subsequent challenges for Emirati
258 Leaders;

259 *“I think operating in an environment where there is a lot of transition and it is constantly
260 changing. There is all the ingredients for dysfunctional teams, dysfunctional organisations.”*

261 (001)

262 *“we have to acknowledge the complexity of being a UAE National leading a multicultural*
263 *team. I’ve come across teams with twelve different nationalities in one team right, and*
264 *everyone is coming from different parts of the world, with different beliefs” (001)*

265 The challenge of cultural understanding due to the significance of differences arose.

266 Participant 003 talks of guardedness;

267 *“I think, it might be more guarded with Emiratis simply because the difference in the*
268 *culture.(003)*

269 Participant 004 talks of how the absence of a shared culture can make building trust more
270 challenging;

271 *“When you are deep in that relationship, you just see sometimes how humour, metaphor,*
272 *sporting analogies, whatever it may be that you use to build trust in another culture, a shared*
273 *culture is off the table here” (004)*

274 Whilst Participant 002 describes how differences present in a multicultural environment
275 make building trust harder;

276 *“I think that the more similar you are to someone or they are to you, the more easier it is to*
277 *trust. You’ve got the same language, same skin colour, same experiences.” (002)*

278 Different motivating factors for UAE Nationals was classified it as a key difference by
279 Participant 004;

280 *“typically an Emirati executive will have gotten that job because he or she, he typically, is*
281 *capable, he’ll have gotten that job probably younger than his peer in the west, he’ll have*
282 *gotten it because he’s smart, because he’s got wasta*, because he’s connected and he’ll have*

283 *gotten the job for that. Chances are that the individual will also be independently wealthy.”*

284 (004)

285 *Wasta = Arabic for connections, influence. Seen as a contributing factor in decision making (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993)

286 *“Finding the burning platform with an Emirati is more difficult than with say finding a*

287 *burning platform for a guy who went to a comprehensive school in Manchester and became*

288 *the CEO of British Gas, because you’ve got carrot and stick, there’s other things inside that*

289 *persons make-up that you can leverage.” (004)*

290 Maslow’s hierarchy of needs was referenced in some interviews (Maslow, 1970), seemingly

291 implying that high levels of independent wealth and job-security result in automatic

292 fulfilment of basic-needs.

293 *“We can’t think about higher order of needs until we’ve paid the bills” (004)*

294 Participant 001 reflected on the leadership potential of UAE Nationals given their higher

295 purpose values;

296 *“lower level values are survival values, whereas the higher level values are at the top. I see a*

297 *lot of the higher level values centred here. This is what is really, really going to make a*

298 *difference in the organisation, because if you have leaders who can operate here, they can*

299 *pull other people up with them” (001)*

300 All participants commented in some form that while national culture is important, it is only

301 one consideration of many when coaching an individual. Organisational culture was

302 highlighted as a key consideration;

303 *“organisations have their own business culture so there are similarities between expats and*

304 *Emiratis within the same business cultures.” (003)*

305 Participant 001 describes culture as a layer;

306 *“we cannot ignore that while systems are extremely important and complex, then people add*
307 *to the complexity, then you put on another layer of culture, it’s not easy to navigate” (001)*

308 While Participant 002 sees it as a filter;

309 *“The way I see it is that culture is a filter. It is a filter, but it is not the only filter that is out*
310 *there... Education, who your parents are, how they treated you, how tall you are, your*
311 *gender, the colour of your skin, where you went to school, who you hung out with, what job*
312 *you have.” (002)*

313 Elaborating with an example of how filters vary in importance and influence depending upon
314 context;

315 *“If I’m dealing with an eighteen year old Indian and I’m dealing with a six year old Indian,*
316 *they’re different people, they’re both Indian, they both have the Indian culture but the*
317 *generation is probably more important at that stage.” (002)*

318 Participant 003 describes steps;

319 *“You have your family, you have your extended family, you have your neighbourhood, your*
320 *society, then you have your nation, your country, then you have your, the world you know.*
321 *It just builds up, step by step.” (003)*

322 Whilst Participant 004 describes the cultural ecosystem;

323 *“Personality is primary importance, number two is national culture and number three is the*
324 *person temporarily enters organisational culture.” (004).*

325 The influence of national culture is strong and omnipresent, the multicultural, transitory
326 environment creates challenges and differences in values and circumstances of UAE
327 Nationals generate different motivational factors. Consistently, national culture is deemed to
328 be only one factor of many that influences the coaching relationship.

329 **Approach & Methods**

330 The third superordinate theme of Approach & Methods consists of four sub-themes (See
331 Figure 1);

- 332 ▪ Consistent Application of Methods,
- 333 ▪ Customise for Individual and Context,
- 334 ▪ Address Culture Directly / Early,
- 335 ▪ Cultural Understanding and Adaptation

336 Participants consistently state that underlying coaching methods do not change much based
337 upon the national culture of the coachee;

338 *“methodology; there are certain things that are off the table, but there are 80% the same as it*
339 *would be anywhere” (004)*

340 Elaborating;

341 *“There is what and a how of coaching. I think the what is pretty steadfast, you know there’s a*
342 *process that one must go through. I think there is questions that one must ask, there is a*
343 *repertoire of tools that one can choose from and then use and then there is a flow and pursuit*
344 *of whatever the end game is. I think where culture arises is in the how. (004)*

345 Participant 004 observes the preparation phase being impacted with Emiratis due to a desire
346 to save face and high-power distance;

347 *“what I do find is very limited here is the utility of 360’s, and also in junior executive*
348 *interviews... I did an exploration, a discovery process for a CEO two weeks ago and he had*
349 *zero appetite to do a 360... due to the confrontational nature of it...he wanted to save face,*
350 *which is a big theme, so 360 was off the table right away.” (004)*

351 All participants stated in a form that the individual always comes before the culture;

352 *“I find that there is more predictive meaning to be found in knowing that a guy is an ENTJ*
353 *for example, or an introverted CFO is more meaningful than knowing the guy is Swiss, or*
354 *knowing that he’s Emirati.” (004)*

355 *“always try to just deal with the individual wherever they came from” (003)*

356 The customisation or tailoring of coaching based on the individual and the context is
357 described by all participants;

358 *“I can’t say that I have one standard approach that I use with every single client because it*
359 *really is a very customised approach that I am using.” (001)*

360 *“There are tools in the toolbox... but then again you tailor the way you go through it.” (003)*

361 Participant 002 reiterates the individualised approach, adding views about being straight and
362 direct;

363 *“You have to treat individuals as individuals. Some people will try too hard to not offend and*
364 *they become a bigger problem by being too vague” (002)*

365 The participants all describe the need to address coaching directly and in the early stages of
366 the engagement;

367 *“when I start a coaching engagement with someone, particularly if it is a male gulf national,*
368 *I would ask him, I would basically put on the table that we come from two very different*
369 *cultures so from a scale of 1-10 how direct can I be with you?” (001)*

370 *“a lot of that cultural stuff, that how honest can I be stuff should take place in that before*
371 *stage, you should have done your mental and physical preparation prior.” (004)*

372 Whilst maintaining a level of cultural adaptability;

373 *“bringing the difference in culture to the table and also make it clear that while I tend to be*
374 *very direct, that is my style, that’s what you will get if you work with me.” (001)*

375 The importance of understanding and adapting to cultural dynamics emerged as a theme;

376 *“the way that I do direction when I don’t know the person very well and I don’t know the*
377 *culture very well, or I don’t know the filters. I ask, is this a thing that you can do, or why*
378 *could you not do this thing?” (002)*

379 However, the extent of the differences can mean that it is not fully possible to understand the
380 others perspective;

381 *“There are an awful lot of minefields where just a verbal faux-pas, because they’re*
382 *non-confrontational they may not say, then it festers, it becomes toxic and you either get to*
383 *know about it, or you don’t get to know about it, but that cultural faux-pas was the deal*
384 *breaker.” (004)*

385 Participant 001 attempts to attribute the reason for challenges in understanding;

386 *“The fear of failing and the fear of losing face when you are holding a responsibility that you*
387 *may have been given at a very early age, or stage in your career. The fear of not being able*
388 *to do that and do it well is a significant amount of pressure to put on someone. We cannot*

389 *possibly understand what that is like, because we are here for a while and we know that we*
390 *will leave and go on somewhere else, but for the UAE National it is there, this is their home,*
391 *this is where their reputation is everything” (001)*

392 Participant 004 conveys acceptance that there are things an expatriate will never fully know
393 or understand;

394 *“you don’t understand the culture as deeply as maybe you could, and you don’t understand*
395 *the boardroom practices once the door closes and all of the expats leave the room” (004)*

396 Participants strongly stated that national culture affects coaching methods either not at all,
397 or very little with the only examples being the impact of power distance and uncertainty
398 avoidance on the use of 360 feedback. However, the impact on approach and content is
399 evident. More time is taken to build trust, motivation needs to be worked upon differently,
400 certain topics are off the table and while cultural understanding is necessary, gaining a full
401 understanding is challenging if indeed possible at all.

402

403

Discussion

404

405 This discussion integrates the theories identified in the literature review with the themes
406 contained within the results, highlights the limitations of the study and proposes how the
407 results may inform practise.

408 Cultural Values

409 Although Hofstede's original and Trompenaars' subsequent cultural dimension work did not
410 cover the UAE specifically (Trompenaars, 1997), Hofstede's work covering the Arab World
411 is a relevant proxy, demonstrating high levels of collectivism and power-distance in the UAE
412 (Hofstede, 1980). (See Table 3).

413 **Table 3. Comparison of Hofstede Cultural Dimensions****

	<u>Individualism</u>	<u>Power-Distance</u>	<u>Uncertainty</u> <u>Avoidance</u>	<u>Masculinity</u>
Arab World*	38	80	68	52
USA	91	40	56	62
UK	89	35	35	66
Japan	46	54	92	95

414

415 *Countries included: Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (Hofstede, 1980)

416 ** Data sourced from Hofstede, 1980)

417 Significant differences in power-distance and individualism were evident in the research,
418 with practical examples of both dimensions appearing in the interviews. These differences

419 indicate that Executive Coaches need to be mindful that high power-distance can change
420 relationship dynamics, reducing openness, increasing expectations on the coach to take the
421 position of power in the relationship and to provide more advice and direction. The low levels
422 of individualism are reflected by the participants discussing the importance of relationships
423 and family. The research indicates the importance of coaches understanding that high relative
424 levels of collectivism is a key differentiator, leading to fundamentally different vantage
425 points for decision making, surfacing in a fear of failure and need to save face that differs
426 from an expatriate from a more individualistic society (Hofstede, 1980).

427 A relationship of trust and understanding was identified as essential to success, aligning with
428 theory that trust is one of the most crucial elements of coaching across cultures (Hicks and
429 Peterson, 1999). Every individual client has their own expectations on how trust is built, a
430 challenge that is accentuated across cultures, therefore an understanding of cultural
431 differences and an appreciation that trust may take longer to develop across cultures will help
432 a coach to anticipate issues and navigate smoothly (Hicks & Peterson, 1997).

433 Once trust is established, the higher level values referred to by participant 001 can be worked
434 upon, offering great potential for UAE Nationals to develop excellence in leadership,
435 becoming strong role models (Scott-Jackson, 2008).

436 Organisations in the UAE tend to be hierarchical with higher levels of power distance than is
437 common in 'western' business practise (Weir, 2003; Weir and Hutchings, 2005). The UAE is
438 a collectivist culture, with a business culture that is well encapsulated as 'hard on issues, soft
439 on people' (Al Omari, 2008). This impact of this is seen in the research, with coachees less
440 likely to provide open, direct feedback to seniors or to directly address employee
441 performance issues.

442 **Business Environment**

443 The multicultural, transitory business environment in the UAE was referred to by most
444 participants as presenting challenges to the coachee, such as managing extremely diverse
445 teams. The significant cultural differences resulting from diversity present challenges to
446 relationship and trust building between coach and coachee as certain tools and common
447 connections to build rapport are less plausible. Indeed, all participants spoke of challenges in
448 developing cultural understanding, consistently asserting that differences are so large that it is
449 impossible to fully understand.

450 Motivation theory is an important factor in Executive Coaching and is impacted by
451 contextual differences facing UAE Nationals. Several participants referred explicitly or
452 implicitly to the hierarchy of needs theory developed by Maslow which remains one of the
453 most popular motivational theories (Pinder, 1984). Maslow asserts that humans are
454 self-actualising subjects that can transcend national culture (Maslow, 1970). However, the
455 theory has been subject to controversy regarding whether it is transferable across cultures
456 (Adler, 1986; Steers and Porter, 1987). An adapted theory developed for Chinese culture that
457 placed the need for belonging before physiological needs due to the high relative levels of
458 collectivism (Nevis, 1983), could be more applicable to the UAE and would be interesting for
459 further research. It could be argued that the challenge to the hierarchy of needs theory is
460 accentuated by the unusually large levels of individual wealth, financial independence and
461 job security amongst UAE Nationals for whom safety and physiological needs are met
462 comfortably. This changes the approach and levers available to the coach to work on
463 motivation with coaches and offers an interesting opportunity for further research.

465 Triandis (1996) argued that self-actualisation is a primarily western, individualistic construct
466 and accordingly may be fundamentally flawed. Later providing a bridge in theory from
467 cultural values to motivation, summarising different value sets into two broad categories;
468 East; including group achievement, harmony, long term relationships, and West; including
469 personal achievement, advancement, dominance, autonomy, self-reliance (Triandis, 2004). It
470 could be argued that in a more collectivist culture, self-actualisation is realised in terms of
471 meeting societal needs and expectations, rather than by more intrinsic or extrinsic individual
472 attainment. This is reflected in the research results with participants describing the abundance
473 of higher consciousness values, such as sustainability and concern for future generations
474 amongst Emiratis.

475 Many participants observed that, whilst national culture is a significant factor, it remains one
476 dimension of many that influences an individual and the coaching process, aligning with
477 Peterson's assertion that an individual is shaped by many things other than culture, such as
478 personality, life experiences, education, profession and social status (Peterson, 2007).

479 Organisations have their own cultures and preferred leadership styles (Schein, 1992), with
480 stronger corporate cultures more likely to significantly influence the behaviour of employees,
481 particularly as they reach more senior levels (Peterson, 2007). Most participants view that
482 organisation and/or sector is a key factor, demonstrated by the culture of certain industries
483 having a stronger influence than national culture, for example in Investment Banking, or Law
484 firms.

485 **Approach & Methods**

486 The participants use a wide range of coaching and coaching psychology methods, including
487 psychoanalytic, personal construct, NLP, transactional analysis, psychometrics and
488 psychosocial theory, yet consistently asserted that national culture does not have much or any

489 impact on the coaching psychology methods that they use. The only example given was the
490 lower utility in 360 degree feedback due to high power-distance and potential loss of face.
491 This is consistent with the view of Hoppe, who sees 360 as well suited to North America's
492 low context, explicit, individual focus, and less suited to collectivist, high context cultures
493 where family and relationships have greater importance (Hoppe, 1998).

494 The highest level of consistency, passion and conviction from the participants was in their
495 assertions that the individual comes first when designing coaching interventions. This aligns
496 well with Peterson's assertion that the coach's challenge is to know the individual regardless
497 of the culture, as whilst culture can be a strong influence on identity and behaviour, it
498 remains an unpredictable factor in determining an individual's values, character or behaviour
499 (Peterson, 2007).

500 Hofstede's dimensions have been criticised for placing too much emphasis on culture as a
501 source of difference. However, similar to the participants, Hofstede does place personality
502 before national culture and human nature. Therefore, perhaps it is the overuse and universal
503 acceptance of Hofstede's cultural dimensions that is problematic, not the framework itself
504 (Hofstede, 1991).

505 Whilst asserting that the selection of coaching approach and methods is always based upon
506 the individual first, generalisations of cultural dynamics are present and seem to serve as a
507 useful guide with it described by Participant 002 as a form of shorthand to understanding
508 differences. Accordingly, cultural norms can help a coach generate hypothesis about the
509 coachee, such as; is this coachee more likely be more motivated by a collective goal than an
510 individual one, or might this coachee prefer authoritative, clear direction rather than an open
511 free conversation. Testing these hypotheses can avoid pitfalls Hicks and Peterson (1997).

512 Many participants stated that they would alter their coaching approach to include direct
513 inquiry early in the process to address how cultural differences may impact the coaching
514 relationship. Placed alongside an expectation of more explicit guidance and direction than
515 would be expected in a western business setting this suggests that directness is more accepted
516 than would be expected from a culture with such high levels of power distance. This would
517 indicate that a different ratio should be considered when coaching UAE Nationals compared
518 with UK nationals, where a survey of coaching psychologists showed 67.9% describing their
519 approach as facilitational, and 17.4% as instructional (Palmer and Whybrow, 2006).

520 Participants referred in varying degrees to the importance of cultural understanding and
521 awareness, and the requirement to maintain adaptability. The interview responses indicate
522 that all participants avoid the ethno-centric pitfalls and operate with an ethno-relative
523 approach in a range between recognising, accepting and integrating differences. This places
524 them in the higher ranges of Rosinski's (1999) model of dealing with cultural differences,
525 adapted from the work of Milton Bennet (1993), however there would seem to be space for
526 the coaches to grow into operating at the highest level of the model and leverage differences,
527 looking to make the most of cultural differences (Rosinski, 1999).

528 Finally, the emergent theory can be summarised by explaining that whilst methods are
529 broadly unchanged, the approach is significantly impacted;

530 *"The what stays much the same, the how changes significantly"* (004)

531 **Limitations of the Study**

532 Research of this nature could be criticised for having less prominence on external validity
533 and scientific controls due to its business setting, qualitative and philosophical nature.
534 However, IPA is concerned with the interpretation of an experiential account of a small

535 number of participants, allowing an under-researched topic to be explored. Accordingly, the
536 small number of participants results in limited data, and therefore the emergent model is
537 limited in its generalisation and would need to be tested further.

538 Another consideration is the broad, generalised definition of expatriate that has been used. In
539 such a multicultural business environment, there are also many cultural differences within the
540 expatriate community.

541 **Implications for Practise and Future Research**

542 The community of UAE-based Executive Coaches can reference the proposed model to
543 inform their understanding of the factors that can influence an individual coachee, to consider
544 appropriate adjustments to coaching approach and the minor impact of culture on coaching
545 approaches and methods. For the UAE business community, this study can provide a
546 additional information to consider in internal executive coaching programs and coach
547 selection.

548 Further research could consider both qualitative and quantitative methods with a broader
549 range of participants. There is also scope to explore the effectiveness and utility of different
550 approaches in coaching psychology in the UAE.

551

552

Conclusions

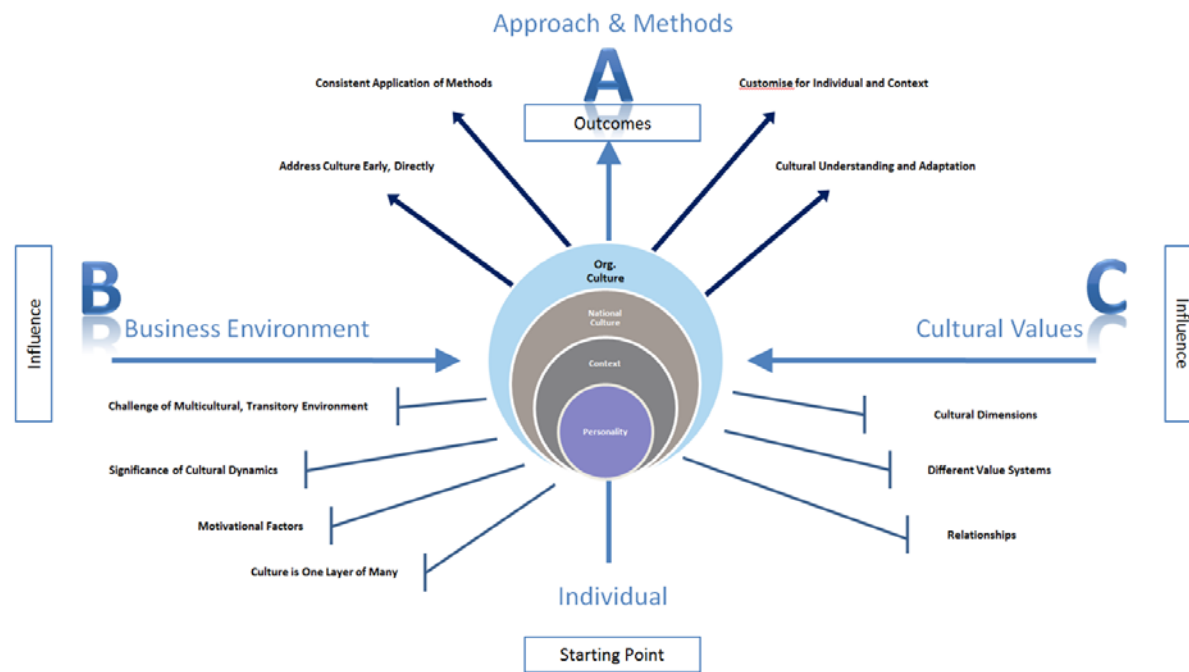
553 This qualitative study explored the intersection of coaching psychology practice and some
554 aspects of national culture in UAE to further our understanding how coaching approaches and
555 methods are used by Executive Coaches with UAE National or Expatriate coachees.

556 This understanding can represent first steps to building a model of Executive Coaching in the
557 UAE with three emerging themes: Cultural Values, Business Environment and Approach &
558 Methods.

559 The results show that the issues of culture are addressed directly, with coaches demonstrating
560 understanding, awareness and adaptation to cultural differences, and supplying higher levels
561 of instruction and direction to UAE Nationals.

562

563 **Figure 2. The ABC model of coaching in the United Arab Emirates**



564

565 Adjustments to approach and methods (A) are driven by the external factors of the UAE's
566 multicultural business environment (B). National culture plays a large role, creating different
567 challenges to address and different motivational considerations for UAE Nationals. Large
568 differences exist in cultural values (C), between UAE Nationals and Expatriates on
569 Hofstede's dimensions, and there are differences in the importance of relationships, trust and
570 family.

571 Whilst there is notable impact to the approach, the coaching psychology methods are reported
572 as being largely unchanged. Culture does not seem a major influence on methods, despite the
573 large cultural differences in the UAE. However, all participants describe significant
574 differences in approach and content based upon the national culture of the coachee.

575 Maintaining focus on the individual, whilst being culturally aware and adaptable seems a
576 recipe for successfully coaching across cultures in the UAE. National culture is clearly an
577 important factor in Executive Coaching, however it is only one of many dimensions to be
578 considered and incorporated in effective coaching process.

579

580

581

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694

List of Tables and Figures

696 Table 1. Interview Questions:

Questions for Coaches:		
Questions for Coaches:	Main Questions:	Additional Questions:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me about your experience of coaching in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What kind of coaching interventions have you led in the UAE? ▪ Who is it typically initiated by and why? ▪ What were the main challenges you were addressing through these coaching interventions?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talk to me about the typical coaching process that you go through? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is your style of interaction? ▪ What (if any) coaching psychology methods do you use? ▪ What frameworks and tools do you typically use? ▪ Why do you select these approaches? ▪ Are these approaches different to what you would employ in other countries? ▪ Do you consciously use different methods depending upon whether the coachee is Emirati or expatriate?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How effective do you think coaching is in the UAE? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you feel that you achieve the stated aims? ▪ Do you feel that your coaching is as successful in the UAE when compared to that provided elsewhere? ▪ Has the topic of national culture arisen during coaching in the UAE?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you feel that national culture plays a role in coaching in the UAE? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If so, what role and how does it play out? ▪ Your culture or theirs? ▪ If not, tell me more about that ▪ Was it a factor in your choice of methods?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ With hindsight, would you change your approach or methods? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you wish went better? ▪ What would you do differently if repeating the coaching now?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you have any other thoughts or insights on coaching practise in the UAE? 	

697

698

699 Table 2. Abstraction Leading to Final Master and Sub-themes

<u>Master and Sub-Themes</u>	Coach # 001	Coach # 002	Coach # 003	Coach # 004
<u>Cultural Values</u>				
Cultural Dimensions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Different Value Systems	✓		✓	✓
Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓
<u>Business Environment</u>				
Significance of Cultural Dynamics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Challenge of Multicultural, Transitory Environment	✓	✓	✓	✓
Motivational Factors	✓	✓		✓
Culture is One Layer of Many	✓	✓	✓	✓
<u>Approach and Methods</u>				
Consistent Application of Methods	✓		✓	✓
Customise for Individual and Context	✓	✓	✓	✓
Address Culture Directly / Early	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cultural Understanding and Adaptation	✓	✓	✓	✓

700

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702

703

704 Table 3. Comparison of Hofstede Cultural Dimensions**

	<u>Individualism</u>	<u>Power-Distance</u>	<u>Uncertainty</u> <u>Avoidance</u>	<u>Masculinity</u>
Arab World*	38	80	68	52
USA	91	40	56	62
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705

706 *Countries included: Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia and United Arab
707 Emirates (Hofstede, 1980)

708 ** Data sourced from Hofstede, 1980)

709 Figure 1. Sub and Superordinate Themes

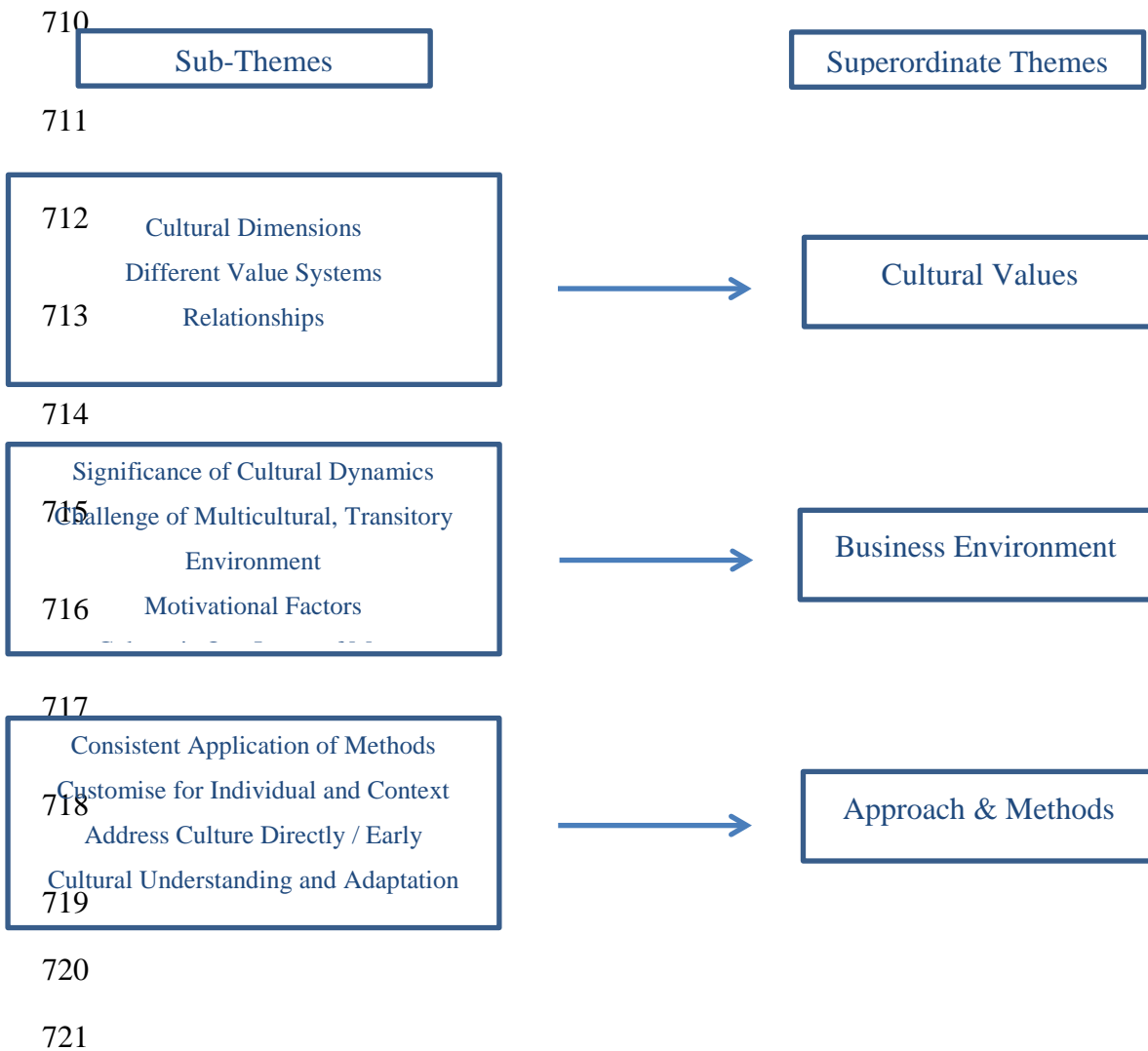


Figure 2. The ABC model of coaching in the United Arab Emirates

