Executive Coaching for Social Work Faculty:
A Framework for Enhancing Leadership and Impact in the Academy

Daphne C. Watkins

Abstract: Executive coaching considers the challenges and opportunities of leaders and organizations. Social work faculty face unique challenges that require academic expertise, leadership acumen, and management skills. While executive coaching has been a long-standing practice in the corporate world, its relevance to social work faculty is relatively unrecognized. This paper examines the science of executive coaching and its alignment with the research, teaching, and service responsibilities of social work faculty. It also presents a framework for how executive coaching can align with professional development for social work faculty. While not all social work faculty aspire to someday hold administrative roles, there may be opportunities for leadership throughout their careers for which executive coaching can position them for success. The implications of executive coaching for social work faculty include the opportunity to examine their potential leadership capabilities, enhance job satisfaction, and serve as social impact leaders for students, colleagues, and the profession.

Keywords: Executive coaching, faculty, leaders, leadership, social impact, social work

Executive coaching has emerged as a powerful tool for professional development across various sectors, and its application in higher education is gaining significant traction (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Hill & Kutsyuruba, 2024). Distinguished from other interventions by its focus on the individual leader's development within the context of their organizational role and responsibilities, executive coaching is a highly contextualized process that considers the specific challenges and opportunities faced by the leader and the broader organizational environment (Bachkirova et al., 2020; Katz, 2021). For social work faculty at colleges and universities, this specialized form of coaching offers a unique opportunity to enhance leadership skills and transform the quality of social work education.

Social work faculty face a multifaceted set of obstacles in their roles. They must balance teaching responsibilities with research demands, engage in community service, mentor students, and often take on administrative duties to offset the workloads of their colleagues (Holley & Young, 2005; Simmons et al., 2022; Smith & Johnson, 2018). Additionally, the field of social work itself is constantly adapting to address changing societal needs, requiring faculty to stay current with both theoretical advancements and practical applications (McCoyd et al., 2023). As the demands on social work educators continue to evolve, incorporating executive coaching into faculty development has become increasingly relevant and transformative (Boyatzis et al., 2013; de Haan et al., 2016; Huston & Weaver, 2008; Mukherjee, 2012). Executive coaching offers a customized approach to help faculty members manage their diverse responsibilities, excel in their roles, and advance their careers.

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Implementing executive coaching programs for social work faculty represents a strategic investment in the future of social work education. By enhancing the leadership capabilities of faculty members, institutions can foster more effective department management, improve student outcomes, and contribute to the overall advancement of the social work profession (Holcomb, 2024; Ross-Sheriff & Orme, 2017). This paper examines the value of executive coaching for social work faculty, exploring its primary goals and key components. It then presents a framework for how executive coaching can align with professional development for social work faculty, enabling them to make strategic decisions that impact their individual career trajectories and institutional success.

What is Executive Coaching?

Executive coaching is a personalized, goal-oriented process designed to develop leadership skills and improve professional performance (Gan et al., 2021). It typically involves one-on-one sessions between a trained coach and a leader, focusing on specific objectives and actionable strategies (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017; The Conference Board, 2023; Hackel & Samson, 2023). In recent years, executive coaching has expanded beyond corporate settings to include academia, where it has shown promise in supporting faculty development, student success, and institutional effectiveness (Iordanou et al., 2016).

From an organizational development perspective, executive coaching is a targeted and personalized intervention designed to enhance leadership effectiveness and organizational performance. Its collaborative, solution-focused process involves a professional coach working one-on-one with leaders or high-potential employees to achieve specific professional goals and improve overall leadership capabilities (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Chen & Rodriguez, 2020; Katz, 2021). This process typically involves the coach serving as a facilitator of learning and development and creating a supportive environment for the leader to grow (Ely et al., 2010; Möeller & Kotte, 2022). The primary objectives of executive coaching in organizational development include improving individual performance, enhancing leadership skills, facilitating successful transitions into new roles, and aligning individual behaviors with organizational goals and culture (The Conference Board, 2023; Hopkins & Meyer, 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Offstein et al., 2020; Vito, 2018). When held regularly, coaching sessions encourage leaders to reflect on their experiences, challenge their assumptions, and develop new perspectives and strategies for addressing leadership challenges. Effective coaching can also lead to increased self-awareness, improved decision-making skills, and more effective interpersonal relationships within the organization (de Haan et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2016). Furthermore, research suggests executive coaching can also benefit the coaches themselves (Mukherjee, 2012).

The coaching relationship is typically time-bound and goal-oriented, with clear objectives established and progress measured throughout the engagement. Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of executive coaching in promoting leadership development and organizational performance (Gan et al., 2021; Kibe & Muathe, 2018). For example, a meta-analysis by Jones and colleagues (2016) found significant positive effects of workplace coaching on individual learning, skills, work attitudes, and goal-directed self-regulation. Meanwhile, Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2018) demonstrated

that executive coaching can improve job performance, increase job satisfaction, and enhance organizational commitment. As organizations face complex challenges in a rapidly changing business, economic, and socio-political environment, executive coaching has emerged as a valuable tool for developing agile, resilient, and influential leaders who can drive organizational success.

Key Components of Executive Coaching

The key components of executive coaching include (1) setting clear, measurable goals, (2) identifying strengths and areas for improvement, (3) developing action plans, (4) providing ongoing feedback and support, and (5) encouraging self-reflection and personal growth (Figure 1). Below, I outline each component and provide additional context as to what it entails.

Figure 1. *Key Components of Executive Coaching*
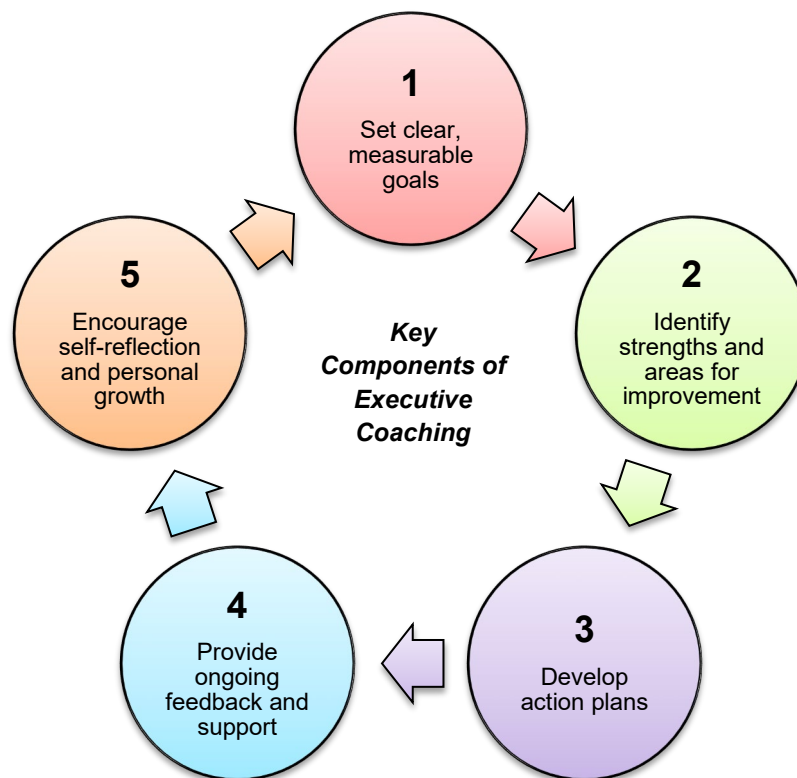
Setting Clear, Measurable Goals

Effective coaching begins with establishing specific, achievable goals aligned with a leader's aspirations and the organization's strategic priorities. These measurable goals must provide a clear direction for the coaching engagement and a benchmark for measuring

progress (Pandolfi, 2020). Clarity is necessary when it comes to setting clear, measurable goals. Therefore, in the most effective coaching settings, a coach and a leader co-create the coaching goals (Passmore et al., 2020). By collaborating with a leader to define concrete, time-bound goals, coaches create a focused framework for development that motivates action and enables the tracking of tangible improvements over time (Panchal & Riddell, 2020). As a coach and leader co-create and agree upon the goals, accountability is easier to achieve and maintain throughout the coaching relationship.

Identifying Strengths and Areas for Improvement

A comprehensive assessment of a leader's current capabilities, including leadership style, skills, and behaviors, forms the foundation for targeted coaching interventions (Ellinger & Ellinger, 2021). A comprehensive assessment can underscore areas of excellence and leverage growth opportunities. In any coaching relationship, self-awareness is crucial for both the coach and the leader (Carden et al., 2022). Through assessment tools (e.g., 360-degree feedback, leadership assessments, strengths-finders, etc.) and in-depth discussions, coaches help leaders gain valuable insights into their strengths, weaknesses, and biases. Over time, this fosters a realistic self-image and illuminates where to focus development efforts.

Developing Action Plans

Coaching relationships rarely thrive without an action plan (Boysen-Rotelli, 2020; Pandolfi, 2020; Vito, 2018). Once goals are set and areas for improvement identified, coaches work with their leaders to create detailed, strategic action plans that outline specific steps, resources, and timelines for achieving desired outcomes and bridging skill gaps. These plans must be customized to individual leaders and can be revised over time (Gormley & van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; Pandolfi, 2020). It is best to think of these tailored plans as roadmaps for personal and professional growth, as they usually incorporate a mix of learning experiences, practical assignments, and behavioral changes designed to stretch the leader's capabilities and drive meaningful progress (Boysen-Rotelli, 2020).

Providing Ongoing Feedback and Support

Regular check-ins, progress reviews, and constructive feedback sessions are essential to the coaching relationship (Boysen-Rotelli, 2020; Gan, Chong, Yuen, et al., 2021). A coach's responsibility to the leader is to offer continuous guidance, encouragement, and accountability as they work toward their goals (Gan, Chong, Yuen, et al., 2021; Plotkina & Sri Ramalu, 2024). Consistency is essential, so many coaches have regular meeting times with leaders and a format for every meeting. Despite this, meeting formats are sometimes unplanned and focus on new, emerging, or urgent topics that the leader is facing at that moment. Through these ongoing interactions, coaches help leaders reflect on their day-to-day leadership experiences, overcome obstacles, and refine their approaches, ensuring sustained momentum and adaptation to changing circumstances (Plotkina & Sri Ramalu, 2024).

Encouraging Self-Reflection and Personal Growth

The coaching process is set against the backdrop of self-reflection and personal development. Therefore, executive coaches must strongly emphasize cultivating a mindset of continuous improvement and self-awareness (Greif & Rauen, 2022; Offstein et al., 2020). This can take several forms. For example, some coaches actively encourage leaders to regularly examine their thoughts, actions, and the impact they have on others (Knowles & Knowles, 2021; Pandolfi, 2020). Introspection leads to insight, so by promoting practices such as journaling, mindfulness exercises, and reflective questioning, coaches help leaders develop a deeper understanding of their values, motivations, and leadership philosophies (Greif & Rauen, 2022). Effective coaching fosters personal growth among leaders that extends beyond the immediate coaching goals and contributes to long-term professional success (Boysen-Rotelli, 2020; Pandolfi, 2020).

The Science of Executive Coaching and Its Connection to Social Work

The science of executive coaching has evolved significantly in recent years, incorporating findings from psychology, business, organizational studies, and leadership studies to enhance its efficacy. Executive coaching involves a professional relationship between a coach and a leader to improve performance, personal development, and leadership skills (The Conference Board, 2023; Hopkins & Meyer, 2019; Offstein et al., 2020). Recent studies emphasize the importance of using evidence-based practices to ensure that coaching interventions lead to measurable improvements in outcomes such as leadership effectiveness, organizational performance, and employee well-being (Onyishi et al., 2021).

Self-awareness and self-regulation are two primary mechanisms through which executive coaching occurs and are skills frequently developed during social work education (The Conference Board, 2023; Hopkins & Meyer, 2019; Offstein et al., 2020; Vito, 2018). Coaches employ various techniques to help leaders gain insights into their behaviors, attitudes, and decision-making processes. These reflective practices, also present in social work training programs, enable leaders to recognize their strengths and areas for development, fostering a growth mindset. Research suggests that coaching interventions can significantly improve leadership development, competencies, and organizational outcomes, particularly when tailored to a leader's needs and within the organization's context (Möeller & Kotte, 2022).

The effectiveness of executive coaching is also contingent upon the quality of the coach-leader relationship. Trust, mutual respect, and open communication are critical not only for social work faculty, their students, and clients, but also for facilitating a productive coach-leader relationship. Leaders are more likely to engage fully in the coaching process when these elements are present, leading to better outcomes. This is akin to social work practitioner-client, faculty-student, and faculty-faculty engagements.

Recent trends in executive coaching emphasize the integration of technology and data analytics to enhance the coaching process. Digital platforms and tools are increasingly used to track progress, gather feedback, and provide real-time insights. This technological

integration not only makes coaching more accessible and scalable but also allows for a more data-driven approach to measuring the effectiveness of coaching interventions. These advancements are particularly relevant in today's dynamic, high-paced environments where, like social work, continuous improvement (i.e., continuing education) and adaptability (i.e., to social, economic, or political shifts) are crucial (The Conference Board, 2023). The future of executive coaching lies in its ability to adapt to the changing needs of organizations and leaders. As organizational landscapes become more complex and volatile, executive coaching must evolve to address emerging challenges such as remote leadership, digital transformation, and greater diversity and inclusion in leadership roles. By staying abreast of these trends and continuously incorporating new research findings, executive coaching is vital for developing effective and resilient leaders, especially in social work.

The Profile of a Social Work Faculty Member

Social work faculty members navigate a multifaceted environment that blends academic demands with the ethical and practical considerations inherent in social work practice. These professionals must skillfully balance the teaching, research, and service triad, often with constrained time and resources (Holcomb, 2024; Holley & Young, 2005). The nature of social work education frequently involves engaging with sensitive topics, requiring faculty to navigate complex emotional and ethical landscapes skillfully (Raveis et al., 2014). Additionally, these educators are tasked with bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring their teaching remains both relevant and applicable to real-world scenarios. Social work programs typically attract a diverse student body with varying levels of experience, necessitating faculty to employ adaptable teaching strategies to meet these diverse needs (Garran et al., 2015). Furthermore, in an increasingly competitive academic landscape, faculty members often must seek external funding and resources to support their research endeavors and programs (Pinto et al., 2016). These responsibilities collectively contribute to faculty member's complex and demanding roles in higher education.

Social work faculty members often find themselves at the intersection of academia and social justice, facing unique challenges stemming from the dual nature of their roles. On one hand, they are scholars expected to contribute to the academic body of knowledge through rigorous research and publications. On the other, they are practitioners and educators tasked with preparing the next generation of social workers to address complex societal issues (Holcomb, 2024). This duality can create tension as faculty members strive to meet the traditional metrics of academic success while maintaining a solid connection to the field and its evolving practices. Furthermore, the pressure to publish in high-impact journals may conflict with the need to produce research that has immediate, practical applications for social work practitioners (Bent-Goodley, 2017).

Social work faculty often engage in community-based research and interventions, which can be time-intensive and may only sometimes align with traditional academic reward structures, creating additional stress and potential career obstacles. The ethical considerations inherent in social work practice add another layer of complexity to the

faculty role. Social work educators must teach ethical decision-making and model it in their research, teaching, and service activities. This includes navigating complex issues related to client confidentiality, informed consent, and cultural sensitivity in research and practice settings. Faculty members may find themselves in situations where academic pursuits intersect with ethical dilemmas, requiring careful consideration and, often, innovative solutions (Bent-Goodley, 2017). For instance, when conducting research with historically underrepresented populations, faculty members must strike a balance between the need for scientific rigor and the imperative to protect participants from harm. Social work faculty are often called upon to address controversial social issues in their classrooms and research, leading to challenging discussions and potential conflicts with students, colleagues, or institutional policies (Funge, 2011; Simmons et al., 2022). These ethical challenges require faculty to maintain a high level of self-awareness and engage in ongoing professional development to ensure they are equipped to handle such situations effectively.

Social work faculty face the ongoing challenge of keeping their curriculum relevant in a rapidly changing social and political landscape. The field of social work is inherently responsive to societal shifts, requiring faculty to continuously update their knowledge and teaching materials to reflect current issues and best practices (Funge, 2011; Smoyer et al., 2020). This may involve incorporating emerging topics such as the impact of technology on social services, the evolution of LGBTQIA2S+ rights, or the effects of global events on local communities. Faculty members must also adapt their teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles and increase the integration of technology in education. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, accelerated the need for social work educators to develop proficiency in online and hybrid teaching modalities, adding another skill set to their already demanding repertoire (Smoyer et al., 2020). Additionally, as social work programs increasingly emphasize interprofessional education, faculty members must collaborate across disciplines and develop curricula that prepare students for integrated practice environments (Holcomb, 2024). These ongoing adaptations require significant time and effort, often stretching already limited resources and adding to the ever-increasing workload of social work faculty.

A Framework for Aligning Executive Coaching With Social Work Faculty Development

The primary goals of executive coaching in social work are to help faculty members improve and maintain good habits associated with their responsibilities. The duties of social work faculty are so closely aligned with constructs of executive coaching that it makes sense to map them onto a framework for how executive coaching can be applied and measured in professional development for social work faculty. Here, I present ten constructs of an executive coaching framework for social work faculty development (See Figure 2) that can influence their leadership journeys in meaningful ways. Using these constructs to guide the professional development of social work faculty will benefit not only them but also their social work students, colleagues, individuals, and communities.

Figure 2. *A Framework for Aligning Executive Coaching with Social Work Faculty Development*

The first construct, **leadership development,** is an essential initiative to cultivate the talents and abilities of high-potential individuals within an organization (Boysen-Rotelli, 2020; Pandolfi, 2020). Effective leadership development can equip leaders and high-achieving colleagues with the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively guide teams, make strategic decisions, and drive overall success (Gan et al., 2021). Studies on leadership development suggest it is a continuous process involving carefully designed mentorship programs and experiential learning opportunities (Pandolfi, 2020; Plotkina & Sri Ramalu, 2024). Social work schools and departments can use executive coaching to cultivate a cadre of skilled leaders equipped to navigate the complexities of today's rapidly evolving sociopolitical landscape and inspire their teams to achieve exceptional results. By investing in executive coaching as a source for leadership development, social work deans and department chairs not only enhance the capabilities of key individuals but also create a robust pipeline of future leaders, fostering a culture of growth, innovation, and adaptability that can propel the field forward in the face of ever-changing market dynamics and competitive pressures. Notably, not all social work faculty aspire to administrative or leadership roles. Considering this, the leadership skills developed during executive coaching can benefit all social work faculty, regardless of their career trajectories.

Performance improvement is a systematic approach to analyzing current processes, workflows, and individual contributions within an organization to identify inefficiencies, bottlenecks, and areas where productivity and effectiveness can be enhanced (Wang et al., 2024). By leveraging data-driven insights, employee feedback, and industry best practices, organizations can develop targeted strategies to address performance gaps, streamline operations, and empower individuals and teams to reach their full potential (Plotkina & Sri Ramalu, 2024; Ramirez, 2024). Through a combination of tailored training programs, technology upgrades, process redesigns, and continuous feedback loops, social work

schools and departments can use executive coaching to create an environment that fosters continuous improvement, encourages innovation, and ultimately drives better results across all levels of the organization, from individual contributors to high-level teams (Lawton-Smith & Cox, 2007; Onyishi et al., 2021).

Organizational alignment is a critical process that involves synchronizing the efforts, goals, and decision-making of leaders and key stakeholders. By utilizing the company's overarching mission, vision, and strategic objectives, a unified direction and purpose can be created throughout all levels of the organization, which is of primary importance (Fergnani & Sweeney, 2021). By fostering open communication channels, implementing robust performance management systems, and regularly revisiting and reinforcing the company's core values and long-term goals, organizations can ensure that leaders' actions and initiatives are consistently driving toward the desired outcomes and creating value in line with the school or department's strategic vision (Cahyono, 2024). Misalignment can be costly, so when executive coaching helps social work faculty and their high-performing teams fully align with the organization's objectives, it leads to more efficient resource allocation (Kulshrestha, 2022), faster decision-making (Away et al., 2021), increased employee engagement (Narmadha & Vinayagam, 2024), and ultimately, improved performance and competitive advantage in the field (Septia & Shafiyah, 2024).

Succession planning is a strategic process that identifies, develops, and nurtures high-potential employees within an organization. This can ensure a robust talent pipeline is ready to step into key leadership roles as they become available, thereby maintaining continuity and preserving institutional knowledge (Septia & Shafiyah, 2024). After systematically assessing the skills, experiences, and leadership qualities of current social work faculty against future organizational needs, schools and departments can use executive coaching to create targeted development plans that provide aspiring leaders with the necessary exposure, training, and challenging assignments to prepare them for increased responsibilities and complex decision-making scenarios (Away et al., 2021). Effective succession planning mitigates the risks associated with unexpected departures or retirements of social work faculty and fosters a culture of growth and opportunity within the organization (Cahyono, 2024). This can lead to increased employee engagement, retention of top talent, and a smoother leadership transition that maintains organizational momentum and strategic direction in the face of change.

Change management is a valuable skill for leaders in today's dynamic organizational environment, encompassing the strategies and techniques needed to guide an organization and its people through transitions, whether structural reorganizations, technological implementations, or shifts in company culture. Adaptability is crucial; therefore, effective change management requires leaders to communicate a compelling vision for the future (Cahyono, 2024; Fergnani & Sweeney, 2021), address concerns and resistance from stakeholders (Plotkina & Sri Ramalu, 2024; Ramirez, 2024) and provide the necessary support and resources to facilitate a smooth transition while maintaining operational efficiency and employee morale (Wang et al., 2024). Utilizing executive coaching to enhance the change management capabilities of social work faculty, schools, and departments increase the likelihood of successful transformations (Pandolfi, 2020), minimize disruptions to productivity (Smith & Johnson, 2018), and foster a more agile and

resilient social work workforce. Ultimately, this workforce will be better equipped to thrive in an ever-evolving societal landscape (The Conference Board, 2023; Offstein et al., 2020), driving innovation and maintaining competitive advantage.

Conflict transformation is a concept that reframes potentially destructive situations as opportunities for systemic change and personal development, leading to more resilient and understanding exchanges among team members (Miall, 2004; Turbanti, 2023). Unlike conflict resolution, transforming conflict enables leaders to address and navigate disagreements, competing interests, and interpersonal tensions that inevitably arise within teams and across organizational boundaries, ultimately fostering a more harmonious and productive work environment. By developing leaders' conflict transformation abilities, organizations can create a culture where differences are addressed constructively, innovative solutions are generated through healthy debate, and collaborative relationships are maintained even in challenging situations (Turbanti, 2023). When equipped with enhanced conflict transformation skills through executive coaching, social work faculty can defuse existing conflicts among faculty, staff, and students, and proactively identify potential sources of tension. This skill leverages their ability to implement strategies that prevent escalation and foster trust and open dialogue, encouraging diverse perspectives while maintaining team cohesion and organizational alignment (Turbanti, 2023).

Enhancing decision-making skills at the executive level is crucial for organizational success. Decision-making empowers leaders to navigate complex organizational landscapes, evaluate multifaceted problems, and make informed choices that can significantly impact the company's direction and performance (Cahyono, 2024; de Haan et al., 2019; Garvey et al., 2014). By using executive coaching to develop critical thinking skills, social work faculty can more effectively synthesize vast amounts of information, consider diverse perspectives, and anticipate potential outcomes. This leads to more robust and strategic decision-making processes that align with long-term departmental goals and broader professional objectives (Jones et al., 2016). Improved decision-making skills result in better outcomes and foster a culture of accountability. It also builds confidence as social work faculty become more adept at balancing risk and reward, adapting to rapidly changing circumstances, and articulating the rationale behind their choices across multiple stakeholders (i.e., department, university, community, and government).

Emotional intelligence is a critical component of effective leadership, encompassing the ability to recognize and manage one's own emotions while also understanding and influencing the feelings of others, which can significantly impact team dynamics, communication, and overall organizational culture (Nesbit, 2012). By developing leaders' emotional intelligence, organizations can foster more empathetic, adaptable, and resilient leaders better equipped to navigate complex situations. The ability to handle complex situations builds stronger relationships across diverse teams and creates a positive work environment that encourages open communication and collaboration (Knowles & Knowles, 2021). Emotionally intelligent social work faculty are not only more effective in motivating and inspiring their students, but they are also better positioned to handle conflicts, manage stress, and make balanced decisions that consider both the rational and emotional aspects of a situation and its potential impact on the school, department, and field. Ultimately, social work faculty who work with an executive coach learn how to

leverage emotional intelligence in their leadership to improve team performance, engagement, and organizational success in an increasingly complex and interconnected world (Nesbit, 2012).

Stress management is crucial for leaders who face high-pressure situations, demanding workloads, and the need to make critical decisions that can significantly impact their organizations and teams (de Haan et al., 2019; Garvey et al., 2014). Leaders can maintain their mental and physical well-being by developing effective stress management techniques, such as mindfulness practices, time management strategies, and healthy coping mechanisms while improving their overall performance and decision-making capabilities (Cahyono, 2024; Jones, 2016). Social work faculty members benefit individually and collectively by working with an executive coach to implement a comprehensive approach to stress management. It also sets a positive example for the school or department, fostering a culture that values well-being, promotes work-life balance, and ultimately leads to increased productivity, creativity, and job satisfaction across all levels of the organization.

Organizational culture is the lifeblood of any workplace (Hopkins & Meyer, 2019). It shapes employee behaviors, attitudes, and overall performance through shared values, beliefs, and practices, which are influenced mainly by leadership at all levels. Organizations can create a more cohesive and engaged workforce aligned with their company's mission and goals by developing leadership practices that embody and reinforce desired cultural elements, such as transparency, innovation, and collaboration (Narmadha & Vinayagam, 2024). By working with an executive coach to model desired behaviors, implement supportive policies, and foster open communication channels, social work faculty can effectively shape and nurture a positive organizational culture that not only attracts and retains top talent but also improves student outcomes, faculty and staff satisfaction, and long-term sustainability in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

In summary, this ten-construct framework can guide an executive coach's work with social work faculty members, helping them enhance their leadership skills, navigate the complex academic environment, and improve their effectiveness in their multifaceted roles. Executive coaching develops leadership competencies in various professional fields, including academia (de Haan et al., 2019). For social work faculty, who often transition into leadership positions without formal management training, coaching can provide vital support in developing the skills (i.e., strategic planning, team management, and organizational leadership) they need for their role and overall career success (Nesbit, 2012).

Implications for Social Work Practice and Leadership Development

This article outlines how social work faculty members can use executive coaching to contribute more effectively to their institutions and communities. Here, I illustrate two ways in which executive coaching aligns with current social work values. The first way highlights the connection between executive coaching and the core competencies and principles of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). A study by Bachkirova and colleagues (2020) found that coaching can enhance a professional's ability to navigate

ethical dilemmas and improve decision-making processes, aligning with the NASW's emphasis on ethics and values. In addition, coaching can help faculty members develop strategies for conducting more impactful research and translating findings into practice, supporting the NASW's focus on research-informed practice (Garvey et al., 2014). There are other ways executive coaching aligns with the NASW competencies and principles (See Table 1 for a list), demonstrating that it is the kind of faculty leadership development that can advance individual careers and the profession as a whole.

Table 1. *How Executive Coaching Connects to Key NASW Competencies and Principles*

NASW Competencies & Principles	The Connection to Executive Coaching
Ethics & Values	NASW emphasizes ethical decision-making & conduct. Executive coaching can help social work faculty navigate ethical dilemmas across multiple settings. Coaches can assist in developing frameworks for ethical decision-making aligned with NASW's Code of Ethics.
Diversity & Difference	NASW stresses the importance of understanding diversity & differences in practice. Executive coaching can help faculty develop greater cultural humility, address unconscious biases, & create more inclusive learning environments & research practices.
Human Rights & Social, Economic, & Environmental Justice	Executive coaching can support faculty in aligning their teaching, research, & service activities with these core social work values. Coaches can help faculty members strategize, incorporating these principles into curriculum development & research agendas.
Practice-Informed Research & Research-Informed Practice	NASW emphasizes the integration of research & practice. Executive coaching can help faculty develop strategies to conduct more impactful research, translate findings into practice, & engage in community-based participatory research.
Policy Practice	Executive coaches can help faculty develop skills to engage in policy practice, including effectively advocating for policy changes & teaching students to do the same.
Engagement, Assessment, & Intervention	Executive coaching can help faculty improve their engagement with students, colleagues, & community partners. It can also aid in developing more effective assessment techniques & interventions for both student learning & program effectiveness.
Professionalism	NASW emphasizes professional conduct & growth. Executive coaching supports this by providing a structured approach to personal & professional development.
Interdisciplinary Collaboration	Executive coaching can help faculty members develop skills for effective interdisciplinary collaboration, a skill that is increasingly important in social work research & practice.
Technology in Social Work	As technology becomes increasingly integral to social work practice & education, executive coaching can help faculty members adapt to & effectively use new technologies in their teaching & research.

The second way executive coaching aligns with current social work values is based on the notion that many social work faculty members want to incorporate social justice principles more *effectively* into their teaching, research, and service activities. By investing in executive coaching, faculty members can further enhance their performance and

strengthen their ability to uphold the social justice principles of our profession. Below, I outline ten tangible ways executive coaching can help social work faculty uphold core social justice values in social work. Coaching programs can achieve this by enhancing the aspirations of social work faculty members toward broader goals of career navigation, strategic career development, professional development, and personal growth (Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Ten Tangible Ways Social Work Faculty Can Benefit from Executive Coaching*

Career Navigation	• Academic Leadership • Balancing Multiple Roles
Strategic Career Development	• Navigating Academic Politics • Career Advancement
Professional Development	• Improving Grant Writing & Fundraising Skills • Enhancing Research Impact
Personal Development	• Enhancing Interpersonal Skills • Managing Stress & Burnout • Personal Growth & Self-Reflection • Adapting to Change

1. **Academic Leadership**: Social work faculty often transition into leadership roles without formal training in leadership or management. An executive coach can help develop essential skills such as strategic planning, team management, and organizational leadership. They can provide guidance on how to effectively lead departments, manage budgets, and implement program changes should faculty members assume more administrative roles. If faculty choose not to take on formal leadership roles, executive coaching can still help them navigate professional relationships, hold difficult conversations, and reflect on the day-to-day activities associated with their jobs.

2. **Balancing Multiple Roles:** The diverse responsibilities of social work faculty—teaching, research, service, and administration—can be overwhelming. An executive coach can help develop effective time management strategies, prioritization techniques, and delegation skills. They can also assist in creating a sustainable work plan that allows faculty members to excel in all areas without burning out. Coaches can help faculty learn to say "no" to less essential tasks and focus on the high-impact activities of their roles.

3. **Navigating Academic Politics:** Academia can be a complex political environment. An executive coach can offer social work faculty an outside perspective on institutional dynamics and help them develop strategies for building alliances, managing conflicts, and advocating for their programs or research. Coaches can also provide valuable perspectives on navigating sensitive situations, such as the tenure and promotion process or taking a stance on interdepartmental politics.

4. **Career Advancement**: Executive coaching is invaluable for social work faculty members aspiring to higher positions, such as department chairs, deans, or provosts. Coaches can help identify and hone the necessary skills for these roles, create career development plans, and provide guidance on building a competitive leadership profile. Coaches can also assist in preparing social work faculty for interviews, developing compelling vision statements, and learning to think more strategically about higher education administration.

5. **Improving Grant Writing and Fundraising Skills**: Securing funding is crucial for many social work faculty members, especially those in tenure-track positions. An executive coach with experience in this area can provide strategies for enhancing grant proposals, developing relationships with funders, and creating compelling narratives for research projects. They can also offer support for building and managing research teams, budgets, students, and multiple projects, as well as disseminating research findings.

6. **Enhancing Research Impact**: An executive coach can help social work faculty develop strategies to increase the visibility and impact of their research. This may include guidance on publishing in high-impact journals, presenting at key conferences, engaging with the media, and utilizing social media and other platforms to disseminate findings for maximum research impact. Executive coaches can also help social work faculty think more broadly about the practical applications and policy implications of their research.

7. **Enhancing Interpersonal Skills**: Effective communication is crucial in academia. An executive coach can help social work faculty strengthen their interpersonal skills, improving their ability to communicate effectively with administrators, teach and mentor students, collaborate with colleagues, and engage with community partners. Communication coaching can involve developing better listening skills, learning to provide constructive feedback, and enhancing public speaking abilities for both academic and professional audiences.

8. **Managing Stress and Burnout**: The pressures of academia can lead to high stress and potential burnout, especially as social work faculty positions become increasingly competitive to obtain and maintain. An executive coach can help social work faculty develop personalized stress management techniques, establish healthy boundaries, and create self-care routines. They can also help identify sources of job satisfaction and align work with personal values, thereby increasing overall fulfillment and resilience.

9. **<u>Personal Growth and Self-Reflection:</u>** Arguably, the most important advantage of having an executive coach is they can provide a confidential space for self-reflection and personal development. They can help social work faculty identify their core values, long-term career goals, and areas for personal growth. This process can lead to greater self-awareness, improved decision-making, and a clearer sense of purpose in both personal and professional life.

10. **<u>Adapting to Change</u>**: As higher education evolves in response to technological advances, economic and political shifts, evolving student demographics, and changing educational approaches, an executive coach can help social work faculty develop the adaptability and change management skills necessary for success. These skills are essential for finding peace and satisfaction in constantly changing and high-paced academic environments. Coaches offer support when implementing new teaching methodologies, adapting to online or hybrid learning environments, or leading departmental charges in response to institutional or societal shifts.

Executive coaching can significantly enhance the effectiveness, satisfaction, and impact of social work faculty in their multifaceted roles. When implemented successfully, executive coaching can provide social work faculty with personalized support beyond traditional professional development offerings. This tailored and targeted professional development opportunity can help social work faculty navigate the unique challenges of academia while continually growing as scholars, teachers, and leaders in their field.

Potential Challenges with Executive Coaching for Social Work Faculty and How to Overcome Them

Despite its benefits, implementing executive coaching programs for social work faculty may not be a straightforward initiative to launch across social work schools and departments. For example, *budget constraints* may prevent institutions from obtaining resources for faculty development, such as executive coaching. One solution is for schools and departments to explore cost-sharing models, grant funding, or alumni donations to support coaching initiatives (Huston & Weaver, 2008). Additionally, institutions could develop internal coaching capacity by training select faculty members or administrators in coaching techniques, creating a more sustainable and cost-effective model.

Also noteworthy is that many social work schools and departments offer macro courses that cover topics such as management and leadership. There may be opportunities to further develop the coaching skills of the faculty who teach these courses. They could then partner with the associate dean of faculty affairs or other faculty development offices to offer coaching to social work faculty colleagues. Partnering with other departments or institutions to develop a shared coaching program could also help distribute costs while fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Another approach might involve leveraging technology to offer virtual coaching sessions, reducing travel expenses, and increasing accessibility for faculty. Additionally, institutions can explore tiered coaching models,

offering group coaching sessions for broader topics and reserving individual coaching for specific leadership development needs, thus maximizing the impact of available resources.

Second, the *time constraints* of social work faculty may influence their likelihood of participating in an executive coaching program. Faculty members often need help finding time for additional commitments. Still, a solution to this challenge is to offer flexible scheduling and integrate coaching into existing faculty development programs at the school or department level (Grant, 2014). This integration could incorporate coaching sessions into regular department meetings or retreats, making them a natural part of the academic calendar. Additionally, institutions can offer asynchronous coaching options, such as email or message-based coaching, allowing faculty to engage at their own pace. Implementing a micro-coaching approach with brief, focused sessions spread over time could also help address time constraints while maintaining program effectiveness. Furthermore, providing incentives, such as workload releases or recognition during tenure and promotion processes (Simmons et al., 2022), could encourage faculty participation and demonstrate institutional commitment to professional development.

Third, *resistance to change* must be acknowledged. Some faculty may be skeptical of coaching's value or be reluctant to participate. However, this resistance can dissipate if institutions communicate clear information and expectations about the benefits of coaching and share success stories from peer institutions (de Haan et al., 2016). Social work schools and departments could offer pilot executive coaching programs or trial sessions to address this challenge, allowing faculty to experience coaching firsthand without a long-term commitment. Engaging respected faculty leaders as early adopters and advocates for coaching programs could help build credibility and encourage participation. Creating a supportive community of practice among coached faculty members, who may someday wish to become coaches themselves, could also foster a culture of continuous improvement and peer learning. Additionally, framing coaching as a strategic investment in faculty success rather than a remedial measure helps shift perceptions and reduce resistance.

Fourth, demonstrating the *return on investment for coaching programs* can be challenging. Still, one solution is to develop clear metrics for success, such as improvements in teaching evaluations, research output, or leadership advancement (Mukherjee, 2012). Social work schools and departments could implement a comprehensive evaluation framework to enhance this approach, including quantitative and qualitative measures (Watkins, 2017). This might involve conducting regular surveys to assess faculty satisfaction, self-efficacy, and the perceived impact of the coaching program on their professional development. Longitudinal studies tracking the career trajectories of faculty members who are coached compared to those who are not could provide valuable insights into the program's long-term benefits. Schools and departments can utilize 360-degree feedback assessments both before and after coaching interventions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of faculty performance and changes in leadership skills. Furthermore, analyzing department-level indicators such as faculty retention rates, successful grant applications, or improvements in departmental climate could help demonstrate the broader impact of the executive coaching program on the organization.

Finally, *finding qualified coaches* is essential. Identifying coaches with the right mix of executive coaching skills and understanding of social work in academia can be difficult. However, schools and departments have a choice in how to combat this challenge. One option is to partner with external coaching organizations to develop internal coaching capacity (Iordanou et al., 2016). Schools and departments can establish a rigorous selection process for external coaches, incorporating criteria specific to social work faculty, such as experience in higher education, an understanding of social work ethics, and familiarity with current trends in social work research and practice. A second, more cost-efficient option is for schools and departments to invest in the professional development of their faculty members, sponsoring them to obtain coaching certifications from reputable organizations, thus building a pool of internal coaches who already possess deep knowledge of the academic context. Establishing a mentorship program where experienced faculty coaches can guide junior faculty colleagues could also help bridge the gap between coaching skills and academic expertise. Furthermore, institutions could explore collaborative partnerships with other social work programs or schools to share coaching resources and expertise, creating a network of qualified coaches familiar with the unique demands of social work faculty. These trained coaches could assemble at the annual Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) Conference and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Program Meeting for annual check-ins and professional development opportunities, as well as to compare notes on their ongoing coaching programs at their respective schools and departments.

Conclusion

Executive coaching represents a powerful tool for enhancing the effectiveness, satisfaction, and impact of social work faculty in higher education. This article presented the science of executive coaching and how it aligns with social work faculty's research, teaching, and service responsibilities. It also provided a framework for applying and measuring executive coaching in professional development for social work faculty. Executive coaching can address the unique challenges faced by social work faculty by enhancing leadership, teaching, and research productivity, ultimately improving faculty, student, and institutional outcomes. As social work schools and departments continue to navigate the complex academic landscape, investing in executive coaching for faculty should emerge as a strategic initiative. The benefits of such programs extend beyond individual faculty members to encompass entire schools, departments, institutions, and, ultimately, the field of social work as a whole. By equipping faculty with enhanced leadership skills and strategic thinking capabilities, executive coaching helps ensure that social work education remains vibrant, relevant, and impactful in addressing society's evolving needs. Looking ahead, continued research, innovation, and investment in executive coaching for social work faculty will be essential. By embracing this powerful faculty developmental tool, institutions can foster a new generation of social work leaders who are well-equipped to navigate the challenges of academia while making meaningful contributions to their field and society.

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