



# Career Coaching Effects on Hope, Confidence, and Maturity

A Qualitative and Quantitative Approach

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Dora Grote, Dr. Jerry Trusty, Minjung Chae, and Amanda Bakley

Kuder, Inc.  
302 Visions Parkway  
Adel, IA 50003  
515.993.3005 (office)  
800.314.8972 (toll free)  
[www.kuder.com](http://www.kuder.com)

## About the Authors

**Dora Grote** is the director of coach services for Kuder, Inc. She oversees the company's delivery of real-time career and education planning support for students and adults through the Kuder<sup>®</sup> Coach<sup>™</sup> program. She works directly with client organizations to develop and implement customized coaching programs. Dora also manages Kuder's professional development courses and serves as an instructor for Kuder Career Advisor Training<sup>®</sup>.

Dora is a certified Global Career Development Facilitator and Business Coach Consultant. She holds a bachelor's degree in business management from the University of Phoenix, a master's degree in business from William Penn University, and is a Ph.D. candidate in general psychology at Walden University. Dora is a member of the American Psychological Association; the Society of Counseling Psychology, Division 17; and Psi Chi, the International Honor Society of Psychology.

**Jerry Trusty, Ph.D.** is a professor of counselor education, counseling psychology, and rehabilitation services and coordinator of the secondary school counseling program at The Pennsylvania State University. He is also a member of the Kuder, Inc. research faculty. In this role, he conducts outcome research on the company's online education and career planning resources and develops customized needs assessments to evaluate key stakeholders' awareness, acceptance, and application of career program initiatives.

Dr. Trusty's research and scholarly work has focused on school dropout prevention, adolescents' educational and career development, parents' influences on adolescents' educational and career development, achievement and opportunity gaps in schools, and quantitative research methods. Much of Dr. Trusty's research has focused on the career development of students experiencing opportunity gaps. Dr. Trusty began his career as a secondary school counselor and as a dropout prevention coordinator for a school district. He became a counselor educator in 1992 after earning his doctorate from Mississippi State University. He served as a faculty member at the University of Alabama and Texas A&M University.

**Minjung Chae** is a doctoral candidate in counselor education and supervision at The Pennsylvania State University. Ms. Chae received her bachelor's degree from Seoul National University in South Korea and her master's degree from Seoul National University in South Korea. She has experience working as a researcher for the development of psychological tests, a counselor for the management of a training program for national counselors in South Korea, and a staff member in the CEDAR clinic at the Pennsylvania State University. Ms. Chae is focused on researching counselor education in her doctoral program at Penn State.

**Amanda Bakley** is a career coach for Kuder, Inc. She also works as an adjunct professor for Des Moines Area Community College for the Arts & Sciences Department. She holds two master's degrees, a master's degree in communication studies from Minnesota State University, Mankato, and a master's degree in higher education: administration and leadership from Kaplan University. Amanda is currently pursuing her Ph.D. at Iowa State University in higher education: leadership and policy studies.

## Summary

This study was designed to investigate the effectiveness of individualized and personalized career coaching sessions with a sample group in Indiana. Of the 87 students and adults who participated in career coaching through the Kuder<sup>®</sup> Coach<sup>™</sup> program in Indiana, 12 were randomly selected for in-depth interviews on their career coaching experience and on their experience using Indiana Career Explorer, powered by Kuder<sup>®</sup>. These interview transcripts are the qualitative data in the study. In addition, the researchers collected quantitative data. Twenty-six students and adults completed quantitative pretests and posttests through which they rated their levels of confidence in performing career development tasks.

**Keywords:** Coaching, career, interviews, resumes, confidence.

## Introduction

The effects of limited career guidance can begin when individuals are young. The American School Counselor Association (2011) (ASCA) recommends the student to counselor ratio as 250:1. However, according to ASCA, the current national average ratio is 470:1. This ratio creates a significant shortfall in personalized career guidance for the student population, leaving a gap in career guidance in the state school systems. With a gap in career guidance, students lack the ability to make immediate choices about careers and classes while creating an even larger problem in making foundational lifelong learning and career choices (Brown & Trusty, 2005) (Turong, 2011). Families spend more money on education because of student indecision in major selection. Students make poor career choices and become unhappy in their jobs, lowering job satisfaction and retention, ultimately leaving people with feelings of hopelessness and frustration in career and education choices (Trusty, 2008).

Career guidance for adults is similar to that of students and may even be a result of limited career guidance at an early age (Bohonos, 2014). Adults seek guidance to improve job and career satisfaction and obtain gainful employment. Adults of all ages and many circumstances need assistance in career guidance and career readiness skills to ensure productive, effective, and satisfactory careers that offer wages to support themselves and their families (Bohonos, 2014).

## Pilot Study

The Indiana pilot coaching study included participants from four Ivy Tech Community College campuses, two Adult Basic Education (ABE) centers, and two WorkOne (workforce development) sites. These locations selected individuals to participate in a research study designed to demonstrate the affect of coaching on career confidence, hope, and maturity. The pilot provided 87 male and female adults and students with two career coaching sessions that lasted approximately 30-45 minutes over a two or three week period. Each session was led by a Kuder Coach.

Overall, coaching provided an effective model for influencing participants in improving career skills and maturity. Through interviews, pre-selected participants shared that coaching improved their ability to format and develop an effective resume, to answer interview questions successfully, and apply for jobs efficiently. This led to increased self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-concept.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the influence of career coaching on career confidence, hope, and maturity with adults who are involved in community college courses, adult education, and workforce development programs. Participants were required to register and complete online assessments using the

Indiana Career Explorer, powered by Kuder as well as take part in two virtual coaching sessions held over the phone or via online chat.

## Literature Review

One major perspective from the literature review about career coaching is the defining difference between career counseling and career coaching. Although, there are similarities, there is debate about a valid competency model for coaches because career coaches do not require licensing or relative education (Hatala & Hisey, 2011). While counselors require licensing and counseling education, career coaches may have varied backgrounds and experience, which in some regard, allows them to be flexible and knowledgeable about “real-life” experiences (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003; Hatala & Hisey, 2011). Career development as a whole includes counselors and coaches; however, counselors typically work within school systems while coaches are usually private business and consist of individuals with previous career experiences opening a practice or establishing processes for coaching within an established business (Hatala & Hisey, 2011). Brown and Trusty (2005) identified the growing demands of school counselors, how counselors may need additional support systems to provide services to their established populations. In addition, it is necessary to ascertain that counselors have strict rules, regulations, and competencies to counsel while coaches, if not appropriately certified, do not have the same competency model (Hatala & Hisey, 2011).

Hatala and Hisey (2011) and Chung and Gfroerer (2003) postulated the importance and recommendations for career coaching specific competency models and ethical standards. Chung and Gfroerer (2003) demonstrated that coaching provides a flexible framework for supporting and mentoring clientele in career skills, such as, confidence and self-efficacy. Chung and Gfroerer (2003) discussed the career development facilitator (CDF), a globally recognized certification for non-counseling career guidance professionals.

## Qualitative Results

### Sample

A sample of 157 individuals was invited to take part in the study and 87 participated in coaching. The sample was selected by each location at random. Prior to meeting with a coach, students and adults were asked to consent to participate in the study and a post-coaching interview. This was requested as part of the pre-assessment before coaching sessions began to ensure the interviews were conducted with a varied population of individuals who were not prompted by a perceived “successful” coaching experience and to gain insights from various perspectives. The interviews were conducted with 12 participants including two postsecondary students and 10 adults from ABE and WorkOne centers. Five females and seven males were interviewed, two of which were from rural and 10 were from urban communities. Ages ranged from 18-74 years old. For the direct quotes from participants shared later in this document, names have been removed for confidentiality purposes, however in some cases the gender of the participant will be identified as well as if they were a student, adult student, or workforce adult.

### Data collection method

Upon completing coaching, the participants that indicated interest in being interviewed in the beginning of the pilot were contacted to schedule an interview by a member of the Kuder, Inc. (Kuder) team who was not involved coaching or the research study. Each participant was asked six questions with clarifying and follow-up questions appropriate to gaining additional information, if necessary. Each interview was recorded with permission from the participant and transcribed into a text document for data analysis purposes.

The questions included:

- Describe your experience using the Indiana Career Explorer.
- Describe your experience working with a coach.
- How would you describe your confidence level in making career choices?
- How would you describe your experience with coaching?
- Please describe how personal decisions were influenced by your coaching experience.
- How has coaching influenced your ability to make short and long-term career decisions?

### Data analysis methods

All the interview transcripts were coded using NVIVO 10 in the style of a grounded theory approach to data analysis. The coding approach included investigator data triangulation from two researchers to discover a common coding system and consistency in order to assess a deeper meaning in the data. This supports the validity of the findings and a broader and deeper understanding of how the investigators viewed the outcomes.

## Findings and Discussion

Three themes became apparent from the review of interviews; Indiana Career Explorer Experiences, Overall Experiences With Career Coaching, and Specific Experiences with Career Coaching. These themes contain sub-themes to clarify responses and experiences. Each theme and its respective responses will be described separately with direct quotations from interviews.

### Theme 1: Indiana Career Explorer

As part of the overall coaching process, the students and adults were encouraged to utilize the Indiana Career Explorer, powered by Kuder. This system includes three career assessments as well as resources on educational, financial, and job searching skills. The Indiana Career Explorer is a customized version of the Kuder® Career Planning System™. Students shared varied responses to the question “Describe your experience using the Indiana Career Explorer.” Seven participants shared positive experiences with the web-based system itself including responses like:

*“[Using the Indiana Career Explorer] was easy. All I had to do was create a login, password, and take three assessments that were right there on the front page. Once you took them, they were [removed] from the front page. They were easy to understand for someone who is not tech-savvy. I could navigate the website just fine. There wasn’t anything that hindered me or that I couldn’t understand.”*

An adult student explained the experience using the assessments by responding,

*“It [the Indiana Career Explorer] actually helped me a lot because when I took the assessments it helped me figure out what I actually like doing and what I could do. I used my profile, the job application, the resume. I looked at everything at least once. It was an excellent website.”*

While others commented positively about the job searching tools available to them by responding,

*“I was able to use jobs category and link to potential [occupations] which was really helpful. I was able to use My Portfolio and linking employers to my profile; that is something I plan on using. Job Search tools is something I’ve used and plan to explore more.”*

*“Yes, I actually like the fact that it [the Indiana Career Explorer] gives you tips on your resumes and all of the tips were very helpful. The website, the way it was presented all stuck out to me.”*

Two students had neutral responses and three students did not have the technical knowledge or experience to utilize the system effectively, if at all in some cases. Two adults did not have access to a functional computer at home, so they only accessed the system once at the WorkOne center.

## Theme 2: Overall Experiences with Career Coaching

### Sub-Theme 1: Satisfaction

Almost all participants expressed their satisfaction with their overall experiences with career coaching by saying that they wanted to recommend it to others. For example, a male workforce adult said,

*"In my honest opinion, y'all coaching and Indiana Career Explorer was more effective than me going to Workforce One. Very much more, it was very more so in detail."*

The reasons why the participants wanted to recommend it to others was varied. One participant mentioned that this coaching experience would be helpful for people who may be lost in their careers. A male workforce adult said,

*"I would definitely recommend career coaching to others, I think that it is a great resource for those who may be a little lost as to where they want to go in their careers."*

One participant mentioned that she wanted to recommend it to others because of the unthreatening environment by talking on the phone. A female workforce adult said,

*"Because coaching over the phone is not so intimidating. They don't know you personally, so they don't have that tendency to judge you."*

One participant reported this experience would be more helpful for people who will enter the job market. A male student said,

*"I have a niece and nephew that are about to enter the job market, and I think that they could definitely gain all kinds of insight from the different workshops and coaching sessions and it would help them a great deal."*

Similarly, another participant pointed out that this experience would be helpful for some people who did not start searching for information about their careers. A male student said,

*"For someone that didn't have the research or didn't already look at what they're doing as much as I did, I think coaching would be really good for them in giving them the information they need."*

Interestingly, his reasoning was related to his particular situation with the coaching experience because he had already made a decision on his career,

*"To be honest even she [the coach] said this, even she said out of the people that she's talked to that I pretty much already knew what I wanted, and I already did the research on it and was already headed in the right direction. To me, [she] was a really enjoyable person, I enjoyed talking to her. She was very pleasant. But, was it necessary for me? I don't think so. It didn't really change anything and I'm still heading in the same direction as I was."*

However, other participants mentioned that even if some people already made a decision in their careers, this coaching experience would be helpful for gaining skills. A male workforce adult, for example, related,

*“If you're a person who is already confident in getting interviews, I think you guys have a tactic that is [a] very genius tactic so that you can be as close to an A+ as possible.”*

In summary, except for one participant, interviewees related their satisfaction with the overall career coaching experience. Based on their statements, the coaching experience would be useful for everyone, whether people are starting to search for information about careers or whether they already have made a career decision.

## **Sub-Theme 2: Effectiveness**

Participants reported that the coaching experience was effective for the following reasons: 1) decision confirmation, 2) self-awareness, 3) new perspectives, and 4) concrete guidance regarding career.

### **1) Decision Confirmation**

For some participants who already made a decision in their careers, the coaching experience was helpful for decision confirmation. For example, a female student said,

*“I really enjoy what I'm doing, but there are other things out there that I enjoy doing. It just reconfirmed that what I'm doing is correct.”*

### **2) Self-Awareness**

Participants reported that they made gains in self-awareness. One participant reported that he came to recognize his mistake related to job research in the past, and recognized his need for personal responsibility. A male workforce adult said,

*“In the past I've been expecting too much by doing too little. I haven't been as active in the job search as I should be and could be to gain somebody's attention and find the kind of career that I'm relevant for.”*

Another participant related that he gained self-awareness about his psychological characteristics. A male student said,

*“I'm an all or nothing, so I kind of wanted to start doing it all at once. It actually hindered me from doing it because doing all that at once starting that all at once is kind of overwhelming. She [the coach] said that instead of trying to do all at once just try to eat healthy when you can or go to the gym when you can.”*

### **3) New Perspectives**

Some participants reported that they began to think about their careers from a new perspective after working with a coach. This shift in thinking provided a different point of view about various topics related to career and goal setting. One participant shared,

*“[The coach] helped me with perspective ... More of trying to change my perspective on things.”* And more specifically, *“I am an all or nothing person [and give up if things don't happen right away]. [The coach] helped me with more manageable timeframes [to break down the goal setting process].”*

This shift in thinking is related to self-concept. One female workforce adult shared that her new found confidence was because of a shift in perspective,

*"My coaching experience made me feel like okay, 'You can do this, and you just have to take extra time to do it.'"*

In addition, a female workforce adult shared that coaching provided a different perspective and alternate plan relating occupational choices,

*"I didn't know these different things were available for me. Just had to take a look at the box, we're all tied to the box we are in [specific occupation]. This job was so hard to find that they said I might have to go to Plan B. I might have to go take a class or look things up. So of course this helped."*

#### 4) Concrete Guidance Regarding Career

A majority of participants related that the concrete guidance regarding career was helpful. Many of them responded that the guidance on resume development was effective. For example, a male workforce adult said,

*"My experience with [the coach] has been great, she has been very helpful in trying to figure out what type of resume better fits my career goals, and which type of resume is more presentable to employers. I've received some good feedback on the resumes I submitted to her."*

Participants responded that the coach offered help in preparing for job interviews. For example, a male workforce adult said,

*"[The coach] gave me a contact tactic and this has been what is giving me my interviews. What I did was apply and take name and location of company and made a chart and made categories lines with all the information and the person hiring. As I call, I type in the information, then call back a day later at a decent time."*

Furthermore, some participants responded that concrete guidance regarding career fit was helpful. For example, one participant described that he got a help by matching his experience with his career interests and jobs. A male workforce adult said,

*"Looking at experience, what I really want to do for a job career, different types of jobs that would fit my experience and interests that I hadn't really thought of ... Where it would fit. I have a lot of management experience. Mostly been in food and how I can get out of it. I explored different avenues about different jobs that would fit my criteria that my experience could cross over to."*

He also said that he got the information about how to move to the next step for achieving his goal,

*"Possibly teaching. What I need to do to go get that certificate. What schools would be the shortest road to do that."*



Another participant reported that she was recommended to read books from the coach. A female workforce adult said,

*"She did encourage me to read a little more, try to get into the books - she sent me some books. She told me to try to read like 15 minutes of books a day. I have not done it, but that's my goal to take 15 minutes a day is to read and get better."*

To summarize, a majority of participants reported that the coaching experience was effective because they gained decision confirmation, self-awareness, new perspectives, and concrete guidance regarding career. These findings carry implications for further research and development of the career coaching program. That is, by knowing how career coaching is effective for participants, the program can be geared toward areas of recognized importance (i.e., decision confirmation, self-awareness, new perspectives, and concrete guidance).

### **Sub-Theme 3: Career Confidence**

According to Niles (2011), career adaptability and realistic attitude support individuals in challenges that arise throughout one's career. Increased confidence supports self-concept and career maturity, hope, and confidence. Although two students indicated that they already had strong self-concept and confidence prior to working with a coach, 10 participants shared an increased confidence in making career choices. One participant shared,

*"[My confidence] right now I would say is very good. This gave me a lot of thought that I could do this or that. [I am more confident because of] showing me that there are different avenues ... you could go back to school and get a two-year certificate."*

While another responded,

*"What I have to go out there and look for, and what I have to do to push myself and things like that. I just have to go in and just, just keep looking and don't give up. You know because it's hard out there. I mean don't give up; I'm not the only one out there. I'm pretty confident now."*

In addition, participants shared,

*"I questioned myself in what I'm doing and now I don't. I have a lot more confidence now, I think I lost it before." And, "I feel like my confidence level has increased since I talked to [the coach]. She has done a great job teaching/telling me how to better approach employers and how to present myself as a future employee for a company."*

After realizing that positive self-talk leads to increased confidence, one participant responded,

*"I would say [my confidence] is better than it was than before I started talking to her. I just think she made me more confident in giving me affirmations to say to myself, 'I'm amazing. I'm capable. I will reach my goals.' That really helped me become more confident in reaching my goals."*

In addition, upon being asked about confidence level after coaching, one participant reflected,

*"My coaching and my experience makes me feel more comfortable and confident at work."*

Moreover, a participant shared,

*"I think my main thing that I got is self-confidence. If I don't have confidence in myself then no one else will."*

### Theme 3: Specific Experiences With Career Coaching

#### Sub-Theme 1: Working with a Coach

With this pilot study, the question, “How would you describe your experience with coaching?” provided a sense of the participants overall attitude and experience working one-on-one with a career coach. Overall, the participants shared that they felt comfortable working with the coach and that the sessions were informative and helpful in improving career maturity, hope, and confidence. All participants described their experience working with a coach as being comfortable and encouraging. Interviewees mentioned that they felt comfortable with a coach. For example, a male workforce adult said,

*“She was polite and she gave me information. I went a little more in depth with her about my personal life than I normally do with someone that I've never seen, but I was comfortable, she made me comfortable talking with her.”*

Two participants highlighted that not making them rush helped them feel comfortable in spite of the situation of talking on the phone and using the computer. For example, a male workforce adult shared,

*“I really enjoyed talking to [the coach]; she was very pleasant, very nice. She made me feel comfortable; I think that's very important. Especially when you're talking on the phone you can easily leave out information. So, I like that. Didn't make me feel rushed or anything. I really enjoyed talking to her.”*

Similarly, a female workforce adult related,

*“I would say something about getting into the computer and all of that, and she would explain to me how to get here and how to get there. It wasn't like (she) was rushing me through or anything. She let me take my time.”*

Other participants reported the importance of the coach's personal characteristics, such as encouraging. For example, a female workforce adult said,

*“I really enjoyed her. It was really uplifting and really encouraging ... But to have her calling every Thursday it really helped me to hear her encouragement and knowing someone is really concerned about my career change and reaching my goals. It kind of made me push a little harder and try a little harder.”*

In summation, all participants described they felt comfortable and encouraged by the coach. Considering the coaching experience was conducted by telephone, having a good relationship with the coach can be salient for successful career coaching.

#### Sub-Theme 2: Job Searching Skills

The coaching experience helped participants focus on job search skills including resume writing, interview techniques, and job application. The responses surrounded a resume technique that customized the resume per job application. In addition, coaches helped participants choose appropriate verbiage and keywords for resumes and cover letters to increase interviews and ultimately job placement. One male student reflected,

*“I guess she kind of helped keep me inspired and I found a job, not a high paying job, but I mean, she kept telling me to say this instead of that. It helped. I mean it has to have affected me positively because I got a job. A job to take care of my family and it is my long-term goal to be financially stable. It has a big influence on my long-term decisions.”*

Another shared,

*“[The coach] told me about my resume. She gave me font examples, headings, and words. She gave me better word choices [and] gave me better ways to shorten it without using so many words. Since I’ve actually talked with her and she has been so in depth with helping me, **my interview numbers have gone up significantly.**”*

Participants increased activity in job searching by taking an active versus passive approach to job application. One male student shared,

*“In the past I’ve been expecting too much by doing too little. I haven’t been as active in the job search as I should be and could be to gain somebody’s attention and find the kind of career that I’m relevant for.”*

And another male workforce adult shared the importance of being actively involved in the job searching process,

*“I’ve started being more involved in job searching. Even if it’s just an online application, I plan on reworking my resume for the position. I learned more about cover letters, so that’s something I plan on exploring a little more, but I’m taking more of an active process now.”*

In addition, participants shared improvement in understanding the format and verbiage in their resumes. A male workforce adult shared,

*“[The coach] had a lot of good choice words that make a big difference when an employer is looking to hire ... there is always a right way to [write a resume] that sends up a flag [for employers] to look at your resume.”*

Moreover, a male workforce adult responded positively about the verbiage use on a resume,

*“[The coach] explained to me different things that I could put on my resume that I hadn’t even thought about. [The coach] told me that I have to keep my resume up-to-date and elaborate on the things that I really do.”*

One additional male workforce adult responded,

*“[The coach] took a great approach of looking at my resume and I really had an honest feeling that she read my resume instead of some people who just glance.”*

Finally, participants received support with interviewing skills that improved interview question responses as described by a female workforce participant,

*“Well, [coaching] was very informative. I’ll say that. [The coach] went through different ways of doing different things [responding to tough interview questions]. I’m trying to say [the coach] was very helpful. [The coach] would say you’re missing that, what to do, what to say, and what to do. (What do you think was most helpful about that?) Um, just opened it up a little bit so you could see different ways to handle different [interview] questions.”*

### **Sub-Theme 3: Creating Short-Term Career Plans**

Some participants reported that the coaching experience helped them create short-term career plans. For example, a male workforce adult related,

*“I've started being more involved in job searching. Even if it's just an online application, I plan on reworking my resume for the position. I learned more about cover letters, so that's something I plan on exploring a little more. But I'm taking more of an active process now.”*

Other participants, however, reported that the coaching experience did not influence their development of short-term career plans. A few participants mentioned that they had not yet reached the stage of setting short-term career plans. For example, a male student said,

*“Not really I guess. The biggest thing I took it was to stop doing things all-or-nothing and try to make things more manageable with the time frames, which I realized I needed to do and she helped to reinforce it.”*

Another participant reported that he did not think coaching experience was intended to set short-term career plans. A male workforce adult said,

*“I mean the coaching, it [was] helpful but it's not going to decide what I'm going to do day to day.”*

In short, some participants reported the coaching experience was helpful for setting short-term career plans, whereas other participants reported that the coaching experience did not affect them. To enhance the participants' setting of short-term career plans, more structured, step-by-step guidance seems to be required. For example, goal-setting and planning processes could be broken into small sequential tasks.

### **Sub-Theme 4: Creating Long-Term Career Plans**

With regard to long-term career plans, some participants related that they set them with the influence of the career coaching experience. For example, a male workforce adult said,

*“With her coaching she talked to me and gave me an eye on if I really want to do what I wanted to do at my objective. My objective is to be a human resources executive. She was honest and asked me questions that stood out for human resources ... I think long-term it helped put me in a better position to see what I wanted to do.”*

Another participant reported more specific steps in her long-term career plan. A female student said,

*“It's helped me with going back to school, and that I might go back and get my bachelors [degree]. It gives me confidence now saying that I just wanted my associates [degree] but you know I could go back and get my bachelors.”*

Some participants responded that they were not ready for developing long-term career plans. A few participants responded that they need more time to reach this stage of career planning. For example, a male workforce adult said,

*“I would say no. Like I said, I'm just getting started. I mean, I've been unemployed for three weeks now so it's not that long of a time frame.”*

Another participant reported that she has intentionally tried to focus only on short-term plans. A female workforce adult stated,

*“I think I'm just trying to think of the short-term now so I don't feel too overwhelmed and I'm just taking one step at a time. Sometimes if I have too much on my plate, I will get overwhelmed.”*

Additionally, one participant reported that she could not set long-term career goals because of her age, which she perceived as a barrier. A female workforce adult said,

*“Like I said as old as I am, I'm not a very good person to be interviewing because I don't have [long term career goals].”*

To summarize, the coaching experience positively influenced the development of long-term career plans for some participants, whereas some participants were not ready to set long-term goals and develop long-term plans. To promote the participants' creation of long-term career plans, encouragement to overcome personal barriers and more future-oriented career guidance seems warranted.

## Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Results

In order to establish validity — or trustworthiness — of the analysis of the interview results, researcher triangulation was employed (see Creswell, 2007). That is, researchers affiliated with Kuder in Adel, Iowa, and the research team at The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) independently analyzed the interview data using NVIVO. The two research teams represent two sides of the triangle; the interview data represent the third side. The degree to which the two teams agree on the themes is the degree to which the results are judged to be valid.

After the two independent analyses were completed, the team at Penn State compared the two sets of results. The themes from the two sets of findings were largely the same, with some slightly different but similar language used by the two teams. Whereas the two sets of results were organized somewhat differently, the themes were the same in both. Thus, the results were deemed trustworthy and valid.

## Quantitative Results

### Participants

Twenty-six participants completed the quantitative survey at the pretest (before career coaching) and the posttest (immediately after career coaching.). Of the participants in the quantitative study, 17 were women and nine were men; and 19 were in some type of postsecondary education and seven were in workforce development. The ages of participants ranged from 19 to 57. The seven participants in workforce development were, on average, older than those in postsecondary education. Up to three out of eight, including the final class, were cancelled due to inclement weather resulting in low survey response rates. In addition, it was challenging to connect with workforce development participants for survey information resulting in a low number of responses.

### Survey Measure

On 11 items, participants rated their degrees of confidence in performing various career development tasks. Some of these tasks involve self-knowledge (e.g., confidence in understanding my interests); some involve career planning processes (e.g., confidence in creating career plans); and some involve more specific and objective tasks (e.g., confidence in creating a resume). Some of these tasks are addressed more directly via the Indiana Career Explorer (e.g., self-knowledge of interests, skills) and some are addressed more directly by career coaching (e.g., communicating effectively).

Participants rated their levels of confidence at two points in time: (a) immediately before career coaching and (b) immediately after the career coaching experience. The ratings were on an 11-point scale, with 0 indicating no confidence and 10 indicating the highest level of confidence. Surveys were administered online using a survey tool.

## Survey Results

Pretest-posttest differences were analyzed, by item, using paired *t* tests. The pretest and posttest means and statistical significance levels are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Participants' Degrees of Confidence Prior to Career Coaching and After Career Coaching.**

Confidence Criterion	Mean Prior to Coaching	Mean After Coaching
Understanding my occupational interests	7.08	8.81**
Understanding my occupational skills	7.46	8.35**
Making career choices	7.58	8.23
Creating short-term career plans	7.04	8.31*
Creating long-term career plans	7.42	8.38*
Creating a resume	5.81	7.62*
Applying for a job	6.96	8.54**
Effectively communicating information	6.96	8.39*
Interacting well with peers and colleagues	7.64	8.80*
Skills to find a job	7.96	8.35
Evaluating jobs that fit for me	7.73	8.73*

\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$

Whereas participants rated their levels of confidence relatively high before career coaching, the ratings were even higher after career coaching. Without exception, participants rated themselves as *more confident* after their career coaching experience. Two of these pretest-posttest differences, however, were not statistically significant (i.e., making career choices, skills to find a job). It appears that career coaching enhanced students confidence in knowing themselves (interests, skills), making long-term and short-term career plans, creating resumes, applying for jobs, job finding skills, evaluating jobs for fit, and effectively communicating. It is likely that the Kuder<sup>®</sup> Career Interests Assessment<sup>™</sup> and Kuder<sup>®</sup> Skills Confidence Assessment<sup>™</sup> available within the Indiana Career Explorer aided in helping students gain confidence in their self-knowledge. The career coaching experience, however, likely aided in gains in confidence in self-knowledge and other areas.

It is noteworthy that the largest mean difference between a mean pretest and posttest rating is students' confidence in applying for a job. Time spent with career coaches likely helped in this regard, offering students practice in communicating about their skills, plans, and goals. It is also likely that career coaching helped boost gains in confidence in communication and in finding jobs that fit. Although the Indiana Career Explorer does not address users' communication skills directly, the system does directly help users in finding jobs that fit for them, and it does help in building resumes.

Many skills are needed to successfully navigate work in the current economy. It seems that career coaching aids with many of these skills. When students, as eventual job seekers, gain confidence in (a) their self-knowledge, (b) their ability to make career plans, (c) their communication with others, and (d) their ability to navigate the job-finding process, they are more likely to be successful.

Participants also rated their levels of hope for the future. These ratings were taken before and after career coaching. Although observed mean ratings were slightly higher after career coaching (pretest = 8.69, posttest = 9.08), this difference was not statistically significant. Because the pretest rating was so high (8.69 on a 0 to 10 scale) significant improvement was unlikely.

## Complementarity of Qualitative and Quantitative Results

Complementarity, a research methodological concept (see Creswell, 2007), occurs when two different research methods (qualitative interviews and quantitative measures in this study) arrive at like conclusions. Both the qualitative and quantitative data showed that participants increased in their degrees of confidence as a result of their career coaching experience. Both research methods showed a relatively high degree of confidence before career coaching, and both methods revealed gains in confidence. Confidence, to some degree, also reflects satisfaction, perceived effectiveness, and useful skills gained and improved through career coaching.

Both the quantitative and qualitative results showed gains in confidence for specific career development tasks such as writing resumes, finding jobs that fit, applying for jobs, and communicating with others. The quantitative analysis revealed gains in confidence for creating both short-term and long-term career plans. The qualitative analysis, however, revealed a more consistent gain in creating short-term plans, and some variability among participants in creating long-term plans. It seems that some participants were not ready for generating long-term career plans, and a few were not focused on short-term plans.

Both the qualitative and quantitative results reflect gains in participants' self-awareness. Self-awareness is salient for finding educational programs and occupations that are a fit for job-seekers. The qualitative results show consistent gains in participants' understanding their interests and skills. Participants attributed self-awareness gains sometimes to the Kuder career assessments and sometimes to the career coaching experience. The quantitative results likewise reveal gains in confidence for self-understanding. When job-seekers understand themselves and understand opportunities available to them, they are able to find career endeavors that fit.

It is encouraging that participants indicated that career coaching enhanced confidence in their communication skills. This was most directly evident in the quantitative data. Although much of the qualitative data from interviews did not address communication directly, it did address communication indirectly. For example, several interview participants felt comfortable in communicating with their career coach about their self-awareness, career plans, and goals. Several described the relationship as highly supportive and encouraging. It is likely that for many participants their career coaching experience was one of only a few times that they have openly discussed their career development experiences with another person. This is probably also true for some of the older interviewees.

In summary, the qualitative and quantitative findings are highly complementary with one another, having no instances of inconsistency. Both types of data point toward positive effects of the career coaching pilot in Indiana.

## Limitations and Constraints

Although coaching was successful, a sample of 157 students was invited to take part in the study. Out of this sample, 87 participated in coaching sessions. The difference between the initial sample and coaching sessions related to participants dropping college level courses and various other reasons for not completing. Some primary reasons for not completing were non-working contact information, no return contact, not attending the meetings, and lack of interest. In addition, a small number actually chose not to meet because they obtained employment. In order to utilize the Indiana Career Explorer, participants needed ongoing access to a computer and the Internet outside of the adult education, community college, and workforce development locations which provided limited use of computers. The survey responses were difficult to collect due to class cancellations because of inclement weather. Overall, the pilot demonstrated positive effect on participants by demonstrating improved job seeking skills, confidence, and perspectives. Coaching provided an avenue for students and adults to learn job skills and improve confidence.

## Conclusions

Despite the challenges in quantitative data collection, there are strengths in the study. First, the researchers used data triangulation to determine the validity (trustworthiness) of the qualitative portion of the study. That is, two research teams, one at the Kuder offices in Adel, Iowa, and one at Penn State, independently analyzed the transcripts. The two teams independently developed the same or highly similar themes for the results, and therefore, the data are trustworthy and valid. Second, the qualitative data are rich. Interviewees seemed open and forthcoming in responding to interview questions, and they readily related their situations and experiences to the interviewer. Third, the qualitative and quantitative data are highly complementary of one another. That is, the interview data and survey results are highly consistent with one another, and no evidence of inconsistency was detected.

Both methods showed enhanced levels of self-confidence resulting from the career coaching experience. This enhanced self-confidence was broad, including self-awareness, career planning, communicating, and specific skills for seeking and securing jobs. The qualitative results revealed a high degree of student/adult satisfaction with the career coaching experience. Career coaching was perceived as effective in helping students/adults become more self-aware, more knowledgeable of job markets, and more effective in their job-seeking skills. Interviewees related that their career coaches were encouraging and supportive. In addition, coaching demonstrated itself to be an effective model to help participants apply, interview, and accept offers for jobs.



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