

Differences between critical moments for clients, coaches and sponsors of coaching (Erik de Haan & Christiane Nieb)

Journal: International Coaching Psychology Review, Vol 10, No 1

Aim of study

Researchers have focused on examining the effectiveness of executive coaching interventions for clients and their organizational sponsors. Erik de Haan in particular, has conducted extensive research on identifying the significant moments in coaching engagements, as described by both coaches and clients. In this study he extends his previous work by considering a third perspective of the coaching engagement (the sponsor's view). Hence the aim of this study is to deepen our understanding of how executive coaching success is perceived in organizations by the different parties involved.

Background

- **What do we know about “critical moments” in coaching?**
 - De Haan has classified critical moments in 4 categories:
 1. Moments of learning – a moment in which new insight was created for coach and client
 2. Moments of relational change – positive or negative changes in the coaching relationship
 3. Moments of significant action – client led action (making notes, taking away action points, organizing future steps) and coach led action (applying oneself to a process like drawing, visualization, role-play etc.)
 4. Moments of significant emotional experience (joy, anxiety, doubt)
- **Sponsors' perceptions of critical moments in coaching**
 - Smither et al., 2013 have found that managers who experienced executive coaching received better evaluations on 360 feedback scores
 - Thach 2002, argues that leaders who were coached for an average of 6 months received better evaluations through 360 feedback
 - Wasylyshyn et al., 1997 suggest that managers and HR partners have reported more effective leadership behaviours and better interpersonal skills for participants of commissioned coaching programmes

Design – Methodology

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study and researchers recruited 177 participants from 22 different countries. Participants consisted of coaching dyads (coaches and clients) and sponsors of coaching (line managers, HR directors and senior partners) who were asked to identify and describe critical events:

1. experienced during coaching (clients)
2. experienced in their work with clients (coaches)
3. experienced with colleagues as a result of the impact of executive coaching (sponsors)

Key findings – Limitations

- Coaching dyads (coaches and clients) agree to a large extent on the type of critical coaching moments in the coaching conversation that lead to tangible change –these are moments of new realisations, new insights and perspectives, and coach -led in the moment actions

- Sponsors of coaching do also recognize significant change coming from coaching conversations; however they focus on the actions that clients initiate as a result of coaching, as well as changes in behaviour and communication.

- There is therefore limited agreement in what the triads (coach, client and sponsor) identify as significant moments in coaching conversations. Organizational sponsors seem to describe these moments from a “solution-focused” perspective, whereas coaches and clients experience this from an “insight –focused” perspective. However awareness of these differences can provide useful insights for executive coaches in adapting their contracting to suit the needs of different parties in an organizational environment.

- An interesting outcome of this study is that it allows for a deeper understanding of how change via coaching is being translated and refined through the various stakeholders of an organization. Essentially, by focusing on “critical moments” of coaching executed in an organizational environment where various parties are involved we can explore the impact an individual level intervention can have at wider organizational context.

- Another interesting outcome is that the researchers’ classification of “critical moments” is very similar to how Schein, the father of organizational development, has conceptualized **organizational culture**. The figure below highlights these similarities:

Schein’s 1985 “onion model”

