

Evidence of competency: exploring coach, coachee and expert evaluations of coaching (James Lawley, The Developing Company London, UK; and Susie Linder-Pelz, Good Decisions, Sydney, NSW, Australia)

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Aim of study

Competency-based coach training and compliance to a coaching methodology are supposed to imply coaching effectiveness and client's satisfaction, but who is in the best position to make the evaluation? Studies have compared coaches and coachee's evaluations, but none have compared a coach trainer-assessor's rating of the coach competency with a client's evaluation. By using a triangulation approach and Clean Language interviewing (a questioning technique as free as possible from questioner's metaphors, assumptions, paradigms or sensations) this study examines coachees, expert-assessors and coaches evaluations and compares them to which extent they correspond.

Background

"Competency" as "the ability to do something successfully" is used as a tool for setting standards, but concepts like "ability" and "success" imply certain assumptions. Moreover, an outcome of coaching might be quite complex and difficult to define as it is known only sometimes after the event (Linder-Pelz & Lawly, 2015). Lack of consensus on how to assess an outcome and scepticism on coachee's evaluation (Greif, 2013; de Haan et al., 2013; de Haan & Duckworth, 2013; Clutterbuck, 2013; Grant, 2014) have contributed to the fact that many competency-based assessments and certifications evaluate coaches' competency just by observing compliance or adherence to a method. If competency is only assessed by the behavior of the coach, without reference to its effectiveness or consideration for the client's evaluation, even if this can be subjective, there is a risk to leave the opinion of the primary beneficiary out of the picture. Hence the need to address the issue from multiple perspectives: that of the coach, coachee and the expert-observer.

Methodology

This study was part of a larger one (Linder-Pelz & Lawley, 2015) that used Clean Language interviewing and involved a multi-method approach to collect data from coaches, coachees and an expert (Dr.Michael Hall) who evaluated the same coaching encounters. Six volunteers coachees were randomly assigned to one of three practicing certified Meta-Coaching coaches. Each one of the coachees received a 90-minute sessions where they chose their topics. Meta-Coaching skills - supporting, listening, questioning, meta-questioning, giving feedback, receiving feedback, inducing state - were taken as indicators of the coaches' competencies and assessed by the primary developer of the Meta-Coaching method. Data of coachees and expert ratings of the coaches' behavior were then collected, set on a scale and compared with the coaches' self-ratings to determine the correspondence of the three key research questions:

1. expert assessment of coaching competencies vs. coachee's evaluation of coaching received
2. coaches' self-ratings vs. coachees' s ratings of value received
3. coaches' self-ratings vs. expert's assessment of their coaching competencies

Key Findings

Question 1: The expert's ratings were consistently lower than those of the coaches and coachees while no support was found for the hypothesis (Hall, 2011) that the more core competencies are observed in coaches, the more successfully their clients will evaluate their coaching.

Question 2: Coaches and coachees ratings showed no clear differences in their evaluations, which were more on the same line than the expert.

Question 3: Coaches ratings of their own coaching was considerably higher than the expert's.

Conclusions

- Coachee and expert opinions can strongly differ suggesting that when either is the sole basis for assessing the coach's competency important factors may be undervalued
- Experts and coaches may be using different criteria and evaluation methods; both viewpoints need to be considered in order to reflect competency, but a more balanced approach should involve experts, coaches and clients perspectives
- Future research should consider whether the assessment of coaching competencies is balanced and whether criteria and benchmarks need expanding

Limitation

- As a small exploratory study it may not be representative of coach assessment in general
- The research could have been more solid if more than one expert was involved
- Findings might have been affected by the different evaluation criteria of the coaching process by the parties involved

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