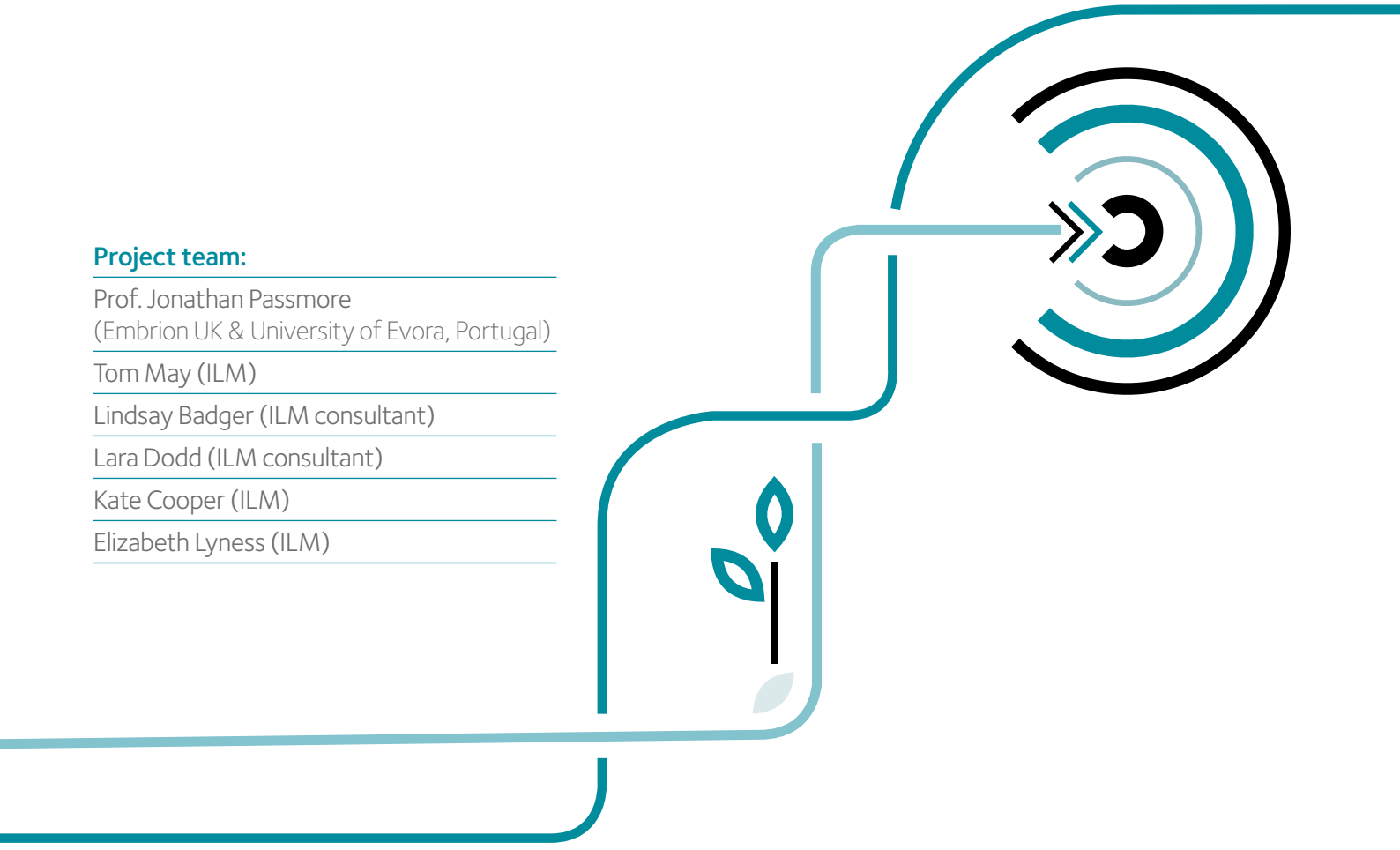
Institute of Leadership & Management

Coaching for success:

The key ingredients for coaching delivery & coach recruitment



Project team:

Prof. Jonathan Passmore
(Embrion UK & University of Evora, Portugal)

Tom May (ILM)

Lindsay Badger (ILM consultant)

Lara Dodd (ILM consultant)

Kate Cooper (ILM)

Elizabeth Lyness (ILM)

Introduction

Workplace coaching (which we refer to as 'coaching') has grown in popularity over the last two decades and is a big growth business (Western, 2012).

The two main coaching bodies, the International Coach Federation and the European Mentoring & Coaching Council, while only founded in 1995 and 1992 respectively, have approximately 30,000 members between them (ICF, 2014. EMCC, 2014). The use of coaches by organisations has been widespread for a number of years. There is a sense that a professional field is emerging from what Sherman and Freas (2004) characterise as 'The Wild West of Executive Coaching'. Although coaches remain unregulated, with no barriers to entry and examples of organisations making poor selections of coaches are not uncommon (Passmore *et al.*, 2013). The demand for accreditation has been driven by individual coaches' needs to establish credibility; though the quality varies, 'the true worth of [some of] these certifications is decidedly questionable' (Grant *et al.* 2010. p. 9.). From our experience, selection of coaches is more often based on informal recommendation than robust methods.

Our sense is that understanding of what coaching is varies between individuals, including coaches themselves. It may also be that understanding of what makes for coaching success also varies. Such variation can be compared to the development of coaching research which has grown from a 'show and tell' of examples and case studies to a number of randomised controlled trials and mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods. So while there is evidence of what works well in coaching, it is not certain that coaches uniformly draw on this to improve their own practice.

Executive summary

Workplace coaching has grown in popularity over the past two decades. Though increasingly professionalised it remains unregulated with no standard definition or agreed measures of coaching success. Those recruiting coaches can help to further professionalise the industry by using simple but robust and structured selection processes.

Workplace coaching is on the rise but remains unregulated

Since the '90s coaching has become widespread. Although there remain no compulsory accreditation or qualifications to practise as a workplace coach, we are definitely moving away from what Stratford Sherman and Alyssa Freas' described in 2004 as the 'wild west' image of coaching; to emerge as a professional field. Research shows that coaching can have significant and positive effects on coachees' performance and goal attainment, as well as skills, attitudes and wellbeing. This trend towards increasing professionalisation is likely to continue and buyers of coaching can encourage this when selecting coaches.

Interpretation of what a coach is still varies

There is no agreed standard definition of coaching and this was reflected by the 49 people interviewed in the research, who included coaches and coachees. While there was broad agreement, there was considerable variation in responses. Almost a quarter of respondents struggled to provide a definition. There was a shared view that a coach facilitates rather than directs and enables an individual to identify their own solutions, and broad agreement on the coaching techniques and methods that worked well. Those techniques cited by both research literature and interviewees included connecting personally, reflecting, having a good coach/client fit, giving challenging feedback and good listening. There was also considerable variation among the interviewees on coaching success with 27 different indicators. The most commonly cited indicator being the coachee's progression and performance.

Selecting coaches, taking a robust approach

The selection of a coach is probably one of the few areas of recruitment or procurement which lacks a robust and structured process. The majority of organisations select coaches based on word-of-mouth recommendation or personal relationships. We suggest a three-stage selection process that can be used by individuals to select their own coach, or someone selecting on behalf of their organisation:

Stage 1: Long list to short list

- What experience of coaching does the coach have?
- Can the coach demonstrate an understanding of the leadership challenges in your industry?
- What training do they have?
- What ethical standards do they work to?
- What supervision does the coach have in place?

Stage 2: Getting down to the last few

- What coaching methodologies does the coach use, when and why?
- What price do they charge?

Stage 3: Final selection

- What does the coach believe they can achieve for their individual coachee?
- What do they believe they can achieve for the organisation?
- Will the coach and coachee get on?

We also suggest that competency frameworks can help to assess and compare competence between coaches, the leading global coaching bodies all publish coach standards. We have used the five leading frameworks to propose a behaviourally anchored rating scale (BARS). This uses three anchor points, from *Starting coaching journey* at the bottom, to

Buyers of coaching (for themselves or their organisation) can encourage the further professionalisation of coaching through their selection of coaches.

Moving towards competence and then *Moving towards mastery* at the top of the scale. Each anchor point has possible behavioural indicators grouped around six factors:

- Establishing a clear contract
- Building a trusting relationship
- Facilitating agenda
- Facilitating reflection and learning
- Managing emotional and organisational boundaries
- Reviewing outcomes.

Factor 1: Establishing a clear contract
Involves explaining the coaching process and agreeing logistical arrangements, also it details confidentiality and the themes of the coaching programme.

Factor 2: Building a trusting relationship
Addresses how the coach communicates (verbally and nonverbally), answers questions and the extent to which they can effectively use personal stories to aid the coachee.

Factor 3: Facilitating agenda
Details the setting of goals, progress towards them and how the coach maintains the coachee's focus on achieving them.

Factor 4: Facilitating reflection and learning
Covers the coach's competence in creating opportunities, via a number of techniques, for the coachee to reflect and then learn.

Factor 5: Managing emotional and organisational boundaries
Considers the appropriate emotional responses from the coach in dealing with the coachee's emotions.

Factor 6: Reviewing outcomes
Both for the coachee and for the coach, as an opportunity to reflect and develop further towards coaching mastery.

Such a scale could be used by individuals and organisations at an assessment centre when selecting a coach. It also provides a simple reference for coaches to refer to, when reflecting on their own progress and development in coaching.

Recommendations

The literature and ILM's own research show a range of understanding and practice amongst coaches as to what works well and the indicators of success. Buyers of coaching (for themselves or their organisation) can encourage the further professionalisation of coaching through their selection of coaches. We recommend to them that they explore the use of more objective methods of selection, such as the 10-question approach and BARS we propose.

We also acknowledge that academics and professional bodies have a part to play in continuing to engage with coaches but also with those responsible for commissioning coaching, to help to increase collective understanding.

Finally we recommend these selection methods to coaches, to refer to, as they reflect on their own development and progression towards mastery in coaching.

Aims and Methodology

Aims and research questions

The aims of this research are to gauge coaches' understanding of what makes for successful coaching (compared to the literature) and to propose a robust method for selecting coaches.

The research questions are as follows:

- How do coaches define coaching?
- How is good coaching being described and how is coaching success being described and understood?
- How much does understanding vary between coaches and compared to the literature?

Where the literature and our research demonstrate a gap or inconsistency in coaches' understanding of what works well in coaching, we hope such a selection method will positively influence the demand for competent coaches.

Approach and Methodology

Given the need to positively engage coaches we have taken an Appreciative Inquiry approach (Cooperrider et al., 2008). This acknowledges the likely bias that coaches will want to share success rather than failure (though we have managed to collect one or two examples of coaching failure). Such an approach misses a potentially rich source of information however, given that we are comparing variation in understanding of success, its loss is mitigated.

We have also used a qualitative method – semi-structured telephone interviews. In total 49 interviews were conducted using prompts based on the research questions above. Thirty-eight were coaches, four were coachees, two were both coaches and coachees and two were 'observers' whose colleagues or staff have been coached and one was a trainer. For many of the coaches, coaching was their primary role but for some coaching was a secondary or additional role. They would consider themselves coaches in that they carried out what they considered to be coaching. The coaches interviewed varied in terms of backgrounds, experience and qualifications. The interviews were recorded and the recordings converted into transcripts for thematic analysis using NVivo (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013), the coding framework was developed *post-hoc* from the transcripts. For consistency, the interviews and the coding in NVivo were carried out by separate people. Three people carried out the interviewing and one person the coding. The project team member carrying out the coding and initial analysis in NVivo was a specialist in qualitative analysis but not coaching. They carried out the coding without knowledge of the relevant literature. So as far as possible, the coding was influenced by what has been found in the transcripts (prompted by the research questions) rather than what might be expected based on the literature.

Literature

Despite more than a decade of debate, coaching still lacks an agreed standard definition (Passmore *et al.*, 2013). Given the disparate range of domains (including counselling, psychology, HR and Business) that members of the coaching community come from, this is perhaps not surprising. Two popular 'big tent definitions' (Passmore *et al.*, 2013) are Whitmore's (1992. P.10) definition, 'Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them' and Whitworth et al. (1998), 'a form of conversation with unspoken ground rules of certain qualities that must be present: respect, openness, compassion, and rigour, our commitment to speaking the truth'.

There have followed attempts at more specific definitions, which will not be rehearsed here but include Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011):

> A Socratic-based future focused dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (coachee/client), where the facilitator uses open questions, summaries and reflections which are aimed at stimulating the self-awareness and personal responsibility of the participant. (p. 74)

'coaching can have large positive effects on coachees' goal attainment, performance and skills and work attitudes'

Appearing to build on Kilburg's (2000) definition, aimed at executive coaching, Graham Wilson (2013) proposes:

> *Coaching is a generally future-oriented, strategic developmental intervention that takes place in an evolving relationship of mutual confidence, and uses a variety of tactics to enable its subject(s) to develop the resources within them to achieve improved performance and/or personal satisfaction, with possible benefit(s) to other stakeholders.*

Characteristically for an emerging domain, definitions have sought to delineate or distinguish it from other interventions (Passmore *et al.*, 2013. Wilson, 2013). What the various definitions tend to share is an understanding that coaching involves a collaborative relationship, between coach and coachee, to help the coachee achieve the professional or personal development goal they desire (Grant, 2005. Grant *et al.*, 2010), by developing the coachee's self-awareness and personal responsibility. While using Whitmore's 1992 definition, ILM describe coaching as:

> *Coaching is the art of facilitating another person's learning, development and performance. Through coaching, people are able to find their own solutions, develop their own skills and change their own behaviours and attitudes.* (ILM, Worth Consulting, 2013. p. 2).

Coaching research has grown, between 1937 and 1999 only 93 papers were published, in contrast to the 425 papers published between 2000 and May 2009 (Grant *et al.*, 2010). While qualitative case study or survey based research has been most typical, there have been a number of small-size randomised controlled trials and experimental designs; Jonathan Passmore and Tim Theeboom (In Press) have listed 19 that they are aware of between 2005 and 2012. These studies variously conclude that coaching can improve coachees' goal attainment and well-being. A separate meta-study found that coaching can have large positive effects on coachees' goal attainment, performance and skills and work attitudes; with medium sized positive effects on coachees' wellbeing and coping (Theeboom et al., 2014). Though citing two previous studies Passmore and Theeboom report that, 'coaches tend to overestimate the effectiveness of coaching capacity interventions' (In Press).

Coaching "works" as a useful organisational intervention, the bigger question is how? Passmore and Theeoom (In Press) have summarised the Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck (1999) study of what works best in coaching shown in table 1.

Table 1:

Coaches	Coachees
Honest, realistic, challenging feedback (positive & negative)	Connecting personally, recognizing where client is.
Good listening, sounding board	Good listening, being a sounding board
Good action ideas, pointers	Reflecting
Clear objective	Caring
No personal agenda	Learning, demonstrating trial & error attitude
Accessibility, availability	Checking back, following up
Straight feedback	Committing to client success and good organizational outcome
Competence, sophistication	Demonstrating integrity, honesty
Seeing a good model of effectiveness	Openness, initiative of client coaching
Coach has seen other career paths	Having good coach/client fit
	Knowing the "unwritten rules"
	"Pushing" the client when necessary

(Passmore and Theeboom, In Press. Adapted from Hall *et al.*, 1999)

One factor not explicitly identified above but which is highlighted by Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) is the quality of the relationship between the coach and coachee, which has been identified by a number of studies. They also suggest that organisational culture and the relationship with the coachee's manager significantly contribute to successful coaching interventions.

Results and discussion

How do coaches define coaching?

The lack of an agreed standard definition is evident from the responses given by the coaches and coachees interviewed. Nearly a quarter struggled to offer a definition (either their own or quoting someone else's). One responded, 'Um [pause], this is quite a tricky one… … I actually have problems defining it' (R28, female, coach). Another reasoned, after giving a definition, 'I would probably have a different definition tomorrow' (R27, female, coach).

The confusion around definition was summarised by one individual:

> *Coaching for me is – what is coaching for me? It is a really good question and one that I don't ponder too much. … Yes, I think many people debated that for many years I am sure that nobody has come up with a clear definition of what it is in my mind anyway… So, I guess it is sort of a broad thing. Now, how I might do that, what coaching actually is, what I do, could be very different for different people. (R25, male, coach)*

Of the definitions given, only one individual quoted one of the definitions we have quoted earlier (Whitmore's). This seeming disconnect between academia and practitioners is concerning. It was captured in a comment by another coach, 'So, there are purist coaching definitions that I know. But they may not always be appropriate. … It is whatever works that is really important for me.' (R25, male, coach).

Between the definitions offered, the common characteristics included techniques (notably questioning and setting agreed targets), outcomes (coachee progression/ performance, achieving agreed targets, or personal development/ confidence/ independent thinking), or in terms of what it is not (such as mentoring).

The use of Socratic questioning was described by one of the coachees interviewed, 'Mmm, I would define coaching as a job where one person is asked open but challenging questions to help them think through a situation which they are facing' (PC1, male, coachee). The notion of facilitating or enabling coachees to identify their own solutions was also fairly common. A few interviewees used the word 'reflecting' and one even defined coaching as 'it's about holding up a mirror so the individual can see themselves' (P5, male, coach). One non-coach linked their definition to the organisation:

> *My definition of coaching would be asking the right questions to draw out people's experiences, good and bad, and to identify and agree an action plan – a way forward – whereby they can overcome the difficulties that they've faced and achieve a business result. (KC2, male, HR L&D)*

Though this varied, for example, one coach saw it as, 'helping people move from where they are now to where they want to be' (LB3, female), another as a '…relationship between two people that helps one person progress in their development goals and job performance' (R11, female, coach).

Understandably it was often easier to define what coaching isn't, 'So, it is not about giving advice. I know you asked for a definition, not what isn't.' (R21, female, coach). Coaching was contrasted with training, counselling, consulting and mentoring. One coach, contrasted coaching with mentoring and included facilitating the coachee to identify their own solutions:

> *Mentoring is about [in] my experience, giving wisdom and knowledge to somebody who doesn't have it. It is about giving someone a solution to go and try, whereas coaching is about getting someone to go and find that solution. (R18, female, coach)*

There were also some definitions offered that were not easy to relate to the main literature and which at least some people would not regard as coaching.

For example,

Ok yeh um I would define coaching as um about improving people and businesses, it's about making sure that the person is aligned with the business, the business ethos and things. (R4, male, coach)

Or seem to go off on a tangent, 'Coaching is like an evolving relationship. It is listening, discussing, measuring, criticising sometimes. It involves a lot of role-play as well.' (R15, male, coach). This confusion spread beyond coaches to those colleagues around the coachee, for example, one interviewee explained:

Coaching is working, by enabling the plans to happen but make no mention of the person needing to be enlightened. So if we're able to enable a process by which the person is educated he feels elevated and he's enlightened. This is what is coaching according to me. (KC4, male, Head of procurement)

How is good coaching being described, how is coaching success being described and understood?

There was a wide spread in the descriptions of good coaching. Comments were more likely to relate to the relationship between the coach and coachee and the importance of confidentiality and trust. A few mentioned having a preliminary, trial or 'chemistry' (R18, female, coach) meeting with a prospective new client in order to build and gauge the rapport between them.

There also seemed to be some uncertainty, '...that is a $6 million question isn't it?'(R13, male, coach). When asked how they described good coaching only one interviewee included feedback, '... being prepared to give some quite challenging feedback...' (R17, female, coach). This question also elicited similar responses to the definition of coaching, including one who thought that good coaching was not about challenging the coachee:

Um good coaching well um good coaching it's an interesting question it's about um it's not training it's not challenging it's about getting the individual to reflect and think about all the options that are available to them, it's about exploring whether they have pushed and challenged themselves. (R20, male, coach)

Others felt that they had a clearer idea of what good coaching looked like. A couple of interviewees thought that good coaching was led by the coachee. Another described good coaching, '...as a very powerful conversation, totally without direction from the coach'. (R24, female, coach). Only three interviewees directly related having clear goals to good coaching and only two mentioned listening to their coachee.

One coach described good coaching in terms that some people would not necessarily recognise as coaching:

> *It is the sort of relationship where, you say, you are imparting wisdom because wisdom is not something that everybody has and certainly when you are early in your career it is something that you do not have. (R8, male, coach)*

Good coaching was sometimes defined in terms of outcomes. One coach described good coaching as, 'whatever works for the client' (R25, male, coach) another, 'where the coachee realises their full potential' (R21, female, coach). The methods or techniques most cited by the most interviewees are listed in descending order in table 2 (below).

Most of these are either fairly self-explanatory or have already been illustrated in the quotes above. 'Contracting' refers to agreeing scope and terms of engagement before the coaching begins and also links to trial meetings to establish trust and rapport. 'General Support & Guidance' were used as general terms rather than to describe the coach doing things that the coachee could do themselves. 'Advice & instruction' was more mixed, most comments were to the effect that it had a role to play in mentoring but not in coaching. However, two interviewees (both coaches) thought that giving advice and instruction did have a role to play.

Table 2

Rank	Coaching method/ techniques used	Interviewees
1=	Questioning - Structured Open Questions	24
1=	Reflection - Thinking	24
2=	Encouraging Self-Help Independent Learning and Thinking	21
2=	General Support & Guidance	21
3	Advice and Instruction	18
4	Goal and-or Targets and Objectives	17
5	Listening	15
6	Feedback	14
7	Contracting	12
8	Learn to play to strengths - Natural abilities	11
9	Discussion - Conversation	10

In terms of how coaching success was described and understood, the 49 interviews collectively gave 27 indications of success. These are shown in table 3 (below) in order of decreasing frequency.

Table 3

Rank	Indication	Interviewees
1	Individual professional progression and performance	43
2	Personal development and confidence	34
3	Feedback	29
4	Influence on business management and practice	22
5	Achieve set/agreed actions and/or targets	21
6	Behaviour and attitudes	16
7	Informed choices and decision making	14
8	Employee engagement – Retention, reducing staff turnover	13
9=	Work based relationships – Harmonious working environment	12
9=	Self-awareness	12
10=	Language/ body language changes	11
10=	Enhancement of skills – Time management, etc.	11
11	Additional work for coaches – Effect on demand	10
12	Communication	9
13	Team work and performance	8
14	Employee initiative – Self management	6
15	Stress	5
16	Independence – Decreased reliance	4
17=	Financial benefits	4
17=	Understanding	4
17=	Increased knowledge	4
17=	Insight - Enlightenment	4
18=	Motivation	3
18=	Happiness, being content, satisfaction	3
19=	Established a mentor relationship	2
19=	Future and strategic planning	2
19=	Risk management	2

‘half of the interviewees pointed towards coachees’ personal growth; their improved confidence and self-assurance, self-esteem and emotional well-being’

The most commonly mentioned indicator of success was the coachee’s progression and improved performance. This reflected their ability to progress in the workplace, to maximise their potential, move forward, be able to handle the change and even to get the job they really wanted. Slightly less than half of the interviewees pointed to the achievement of agreed goals or targets, ‘How do you measure success? It’s the target that somebody set themselves and they achieved it really.’ (R13, male, coach). Between a fifth and a quarter pointed to enhanced skills.

Nearly a third pointed to changes in behaviour and attitudes. Over half of the interviewees pointed towards coachees’ personal growth; their improved confidence and self-assurance, self-esteem and emotional well-being. For example:

> *…it gave me a lot of assurance about my, it helped me refocus on my positive strengths, it helped me to recognise my resilience and it really enable[d] me to really focus on applying for a particular job that I really desperately wanted and got [laughs]. (LB2, female, coachee)*

One coach reported the transformation in one of his coachees:

> *…it was just watching his entire transition from a person who was stressed and tired, highly agitated, if not cornered. He morphed into a confident, self-assured professional who successfully made the transition from the company that was in the £15million bracket to one that was twenty times that. (R23, male, coach)*

Over half cited positive feedback from coachees, their line managers and colleagues, either verbally or more formally through appraisals, including 360s. One coach gave an example, ‘He had received 360 feedback a couple of years ago. He has one again this year. There has been a significant shift in what people are saying about him.’ (R11, female, coach).

Slightly under half of the interviewees referred to the effect their coaching intervention had on their coachees’ practice at work. In one example, one coachee had ensured that, in meetings with their staff, listening to those staff was part of the meeting agenda. Approximately a quarter highlighted their coachees’ ability to make informed choices around key decisions to be made and a similar number pointed to indicators of increased employee engagement – staff retention rates. Approximately a quarter pointed to their coachees’ increased self-awareness and to improved working relationships, creating a more harmonious working environment.

A few coaches pointed to return business from former clients or to referrals as another indication of coaching success. For example, ‘It must work because I have got three of his staff to coach now, (R13, male, coach).

In terms of business benefits, return on investment (ROI) was referred to. One coach highlighted the time saved for an organisation by starting meetings on time. Other examples were from increased sales, though one coach reflected that, ‘It’s very difficult to find a tangible ROI…’ (KC3, female, coach).

It is notable that the four coachees and two observers had relatively little to offer in terms of suggesting indications of coaching success, in contrast to the coaches. Although the lack of comments from a minority of six people is not necessarily significant.

'what is also noticeable is the apparent confusion and variation in understanding, this is indicative of coaching as an emerging domain'

Discussion

The variation in definitions is evident from the wide range of those offered by the interviewees and is broadly consistent with the range found in the literature. The sense of the coach facilitating rather than directing, in a collaborative relationship and the use of open questions are also evident in both the literature and the responses analysed. But what is also noticeable is the apparent confusion and variation in understanding, this is indicative of coaching as an emerging domain and the disparate professional backgrounds of coaches. This is evident from the difficulty that a few of the interviewees had in offering any definition of coaching, which at least superficially would appear to be simple. It is also echoed by the response describing what consists of good coaching as the '$6 million dollar question'.

Regarding the benefits of coaching, some of the interviewees gave examples of goal attainment and improved well-being as well as improved performance and skills, which are reported by the studies reviewed by Passmore and Theeboom (In Press) and Theeboom et al. (2014) and mentioned above. The interviewees also list other indications of success. Altogether, the interviewees' indications of success can be broadly grouped around increased well-being and awareness (including confidence), changed behaviours and attitudes, skills and performance (including achieving set goals). These are broadly similar to those reported in the literature, though described in a range of ways. However, a few of the minority suggestions such as enlightenment and additional work for coaches do not necessarily evidence the success of a coaching intervention. There were some examples of ROI but they were not widespread.

It is interesting that the four coachees and two observers made few suggestions. The lack of comments from just six individuals is not sufficient to generalise, but their relative silence, in contrast to the coaches' responses is consistent with previous research findings that coaches may over-estimate the effect of coaching interventions.

Table 4 (below) relates what has been identified as what works well in the academic literature to the methods identified by the interviewees. The first column lists the methods from the literature that were also identified by the interviewees. The second column lists the additional methods also identified by the interviewees.

There is clearly overlap, however, it is far from complete. It may be that some of these are implicitly included in the interviews and would be agreed by our sample, yet they have not obviously been included. Also, while the interview responses collectively relate to these characteristics, as explained in the results, the individual responses are more disparate. This indicates a range of views as to what characterises good coaching and the potential benefit offered by a robust method to select coaches.

Table 4

Identified as working well in literature and identified by interviewees	Additional methods identified by interviewees
Connecting personally	Structured open questions
Reflecting	Encouraging independent learning and thinking
Having good coach/client fit	General support and guidance
Challenging feedback (positive and negative)	Advice and Instruction
Good listening	Contracting ('chemistry meeting')
Good action ideas, pointers	Playing to strengths
Clear objective	Discussion - Conversation

Selecting coaches

Selecting a coach: subjective and objective approaches

As this report and others have noted, the popularity of coaching has grown significantly since 2001 in the UK, reflecting similar growth across the world. As demand for coaching has risen, so has the supply of coaches. This has brought the challenge for organisations and individuals of which coach to appoint.

During the early days of coaching, when growth was at its fastest, some commentators described the growing market as little more than a wild west (Sherman & Freas, 2004). In this market the unsuspecting buyer was at risk from charlatans and snake oil sales men and the unsuspecting coachee was at risk of harm and potential psychological damage (Berglas, 2002). These claims may have been overstated, but as an unregulated market, the law of **Caveat Emptor** remains. The coaching buyer needs to be careful of what they are buying and to question the claims made by the seller (the individual coach or coaching provider).

In spite of the unregulated nature of the market, the most popular method for selecting a coach remains personal relationships. This happens either by the individual manager meeting their potential coach or organisation, or being recommended to them. This system of selection removes the opportunity for organisations to ensure the quality of the coach or coaching provider.

Over the past five years there has been a growing interest in larger organisations in alternative methods of coach provider selection. This has seen a growth in the tendering of coaching provision and for the successful coaching provider to provide a bundle of coaches. Some HR managers have argued that by tendering coaching contracts in this way, they can achieve better value for money and also provide a clearer framework within which coaches will operate. This shift is a clear improvement from simply relying on personal relationships or recommendation. It would seem right that organisations should take as much care in selecting and appointing an individual coach as they do in recruiting a coaching provider.

So how can organisations get better at selecting the right coach, when offered a bundle of coaches? For both the individual manager and for the organisation making a selection, one method is to explore the experience, knowledge and skills of the coach. We have offered ten themes to explore, along with some thoughts on what the manager making the appointment should be looking for, that is more likely to lead to the manager (and their organisation) getting the most from the coaching assignment.

We have suggested this as a three stage process, however these factors could be considered as a whole, if the number of candidates were three, rather than say 30.

Stage 1:
Moving from long list to short list

The following questions will help you to select a short list of potential providers.

1. **What experience of coaching does the coach have?**
   Coaching experience is now regularly assessed by professional bodies in terms of the number of hours. Coaching is a practice-based skill and there is a rough relationship between hours of practice and expertise, although this is not the full story. As a rough guide a coach with less than 50 hours is likely to be a novice, with more than 250 the person has good experience and we would suggest professional coaches (for whom coaching is their primary role) should have 500 or more coaching hours.

2. **Can the coach demonstrate an understanding of the leadership challenges in your industry?**
   Coaches can come from a wide range of backgrounds and industries. While some have argued, like Sir John Whitmore (1992), that sector knowledge does not matter, the evidence is that understanding both leadership and the sector helps in framing the conversation. Ask whether the coach has held a management, senior manager or c-suite role? What were they? What was their responsibility? How do they use this understanding in their coaching? What types of challenges do their senior manager coaches commonly present? These all give a sense of whether the coach has experience and equally importantly can use this in aid of their coachees.

3. **What training do they have?**
   Most coaches have had no formal training, and many consulting organisations supplying coaches still consider this to be acceptable. But the growth in the market and development of training courses, means that organisations can now be more demanding in their expectations. Most of us would not go to an untrained counsellor or doctor. There is now no need to do this with coaches. The two largest UK professional bodies, the Association for Coaching (AC) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) have both developed accreditation. This is a start, but in addition we suggest the coach should have post graduate training if they are undertaking management coaching – the ILM Certificate in Executive Coaching is useful and we might expect for a professional coach that they have secured the ILM Diploma or a masters degree in coaching.

4. **What ethical standards do they work to?**
   Ethical practice is an important part of coaching, as it is for particular professions such as doctors, therapists and counsellors. At present, coaching is unregulated, so there is no requirement for a coach to follow any particular standard or practice. In the UK, the AC, the EMCC, plus the British Psychology Society (BPS) set out ethical standards for their members. This means organisations, and individual clients, can hold them to account for their practice. Each body has an online public register, which is worth checking. Is the coach on it? What grade of member are they?

5. **What supervision does the coach have in place?**
   Coaching can be a challenging area of work. Supervision has now been widely recognised as a key requirement for accredited coaches with the BPS, AC and other coaching membership bodies. Organisations should rightly expect the coach to have their own supervision arrangement.

The first five questions could potentially be assessed on a paper based review, or checking online databases. The second set of questions require more detailed explanation, and are more usefully part of a discussion process with the coach.

Stage 2:
Getting down to the last few

6. **What coaching methodologies does the coach use, when and why?**
   A good coach will be able to describe the model that they use in their coaching work. Most will be using a behavioural based model (for example GROW (Goal, Reality, Options/Obstacles, Way Forward)), cognitive behavioural model (for example Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC)), or Motivational Interview (MI). Even better are coaches who can use all three. Whichever model they are using, ask them to outline the evidence base for their approach. A professional coach should be able to offer the research evidence which underpins their approach.

7. **What price do they charge?**
   There are wide price variations. When the coaches are provided as part of a group of coaches there is usually a standard price per session or for a series of sessions (four or six are usually standard groupings). However, for individual coaches it is important to review this. Compare prices, alongside the evidence you have collected in Stage 1.

   The answers to these two questions will help to further refine the list to the last few.

Stage 3:
Final selection

8. **What does the coach believe they can achieve for their individual coachee?**
   Some organisations invite coaches in, but are vague about what they want to see coaching achieve for individuals. In contrast, some coaches will claim the magic of coaching will transform your performance. Be cautious of both. Try and agree some realistic goals.

9. **What do they believe they can achieve for the organisation?**
   If coaching is being paid for by the organisation then the organisation should rightly expect positive benefits too. One way of linking the goals back to the organisation is for the coachee's line manager to participate in the initial agenda-goal setting meeting with the coach. This provides the opportunity for the manager to jointly agree the agenda. At the end of the coaching assignment, the same line manager could also usefully be involved to review the outcome with the coachee and the coach, and for the three to jointly report back to the commissioning manager on the outcomes.

10. **Will the coach and coachee get on?**
    A final, but important question is whether the coachee and coach will get on. In organisations this is best achieved when the coachee can select their coach. Research from mentoring has shown that selection is an important component in the mentoring relationship and a predictor of successful outcomes. Organisations can achieve this in many ways, but using an intranet site that allows the coachees to review the biographies and photos of the coaches has been successfully used by a number of organisations and coaching networks. A second useful tactic is for a chemistry meeting between the coach and coachee. This (typically) 30 minute pre-coaching meeting is useful to set expectations as well as provide an opportunity for both parties to confirm they can work together.

‘we have taken the five leading frameworks and use these as the basis to develop a behaviourally anchored rating scale’

Assessment Centre Model

An alternative model to the interview is the use of an assessment centre to review the competence of coaches. An assessment centre is a physical place and time at which the potential coach can be assessed to determine their suitability. The method has become increasing popular for employment selection (see, for example, Hill, 2013), because of the reliability of the method in selecting candidates who are more likely to be successful in the role. The centre often includes a variety of processes, such as interviews, group discussion and exercises. To assist with the selection the panel will often use a competency framework, designed to evaluate each candidate against, with behaviourally anchored rating scales (BARS) (Smith & Kendall, 1963). These BARS help provide examples at each level of the types of behaviours that might be evident for a specific level of competence.

Competency Frameworks in coaching

A ‘competency framework’ is a structure that sets out and defines each individual competency (such as questioning or listening) required by the coach. In the early period of coaching’s development some (Ferrar, 2004) suggested that it would be difficult for professional bodies to build competency frameworks for coaching, due to the complexity of the process and the variety of views. While such complexity exists in coaching, as it does in management, professional bodies have made significant steps towards developing and more recently refining coach competency frameworks.

The leading global coaching bodies now all publish coach standards (AC, 2012. BPS, 2012. EMCC, 2009. ICF, 2014. WBC, 2007). As part of this research we undertook a review of these frameworks. The review revealed a high level of agreement between the different bodies. This suggests that there is growing consensus, which is shared with the research literature, on what constitutes good practice. The review also revealed how difficult it would be to use some of these frameworks as a tool to assess coaches’ practice. This is because the majority of the framework statements are not behaviourally based.

A second common factor related to the scale of the documents. By including many items, some documents make it difficult for a commissioning manager to use these as an assessment tool during an assessment centre process.

As a result we have taken the five leading frameworks and use these as the basis to develop a behaviourally anchored rating scale, using three anchor points. We subsequently tested the model against the key behaviours, identified within the research literature (Grant et al, 2010 & Lai & McDowall, 2014), that provide indicators of coaching success.

We offer three anchor points. Firstly for a coach starting their coaching development, a coach moving towards competence (which may reflect the behaviours of a coach towards the end of their training or in the early years of practice), and thirdly those moving towards mastery (which includes those with more experience and who are coaching at a high level).

We deliberately did not place the anchor at point 10 on the scale – master coach- as we believe mastery is firstly a journey rather than a final destination. Secondly, mastery can be achieved in a variety of ways depending on the individual and the approaches which they are using.

We believe the proposed BARS could be used, by individuals or organisations, including at an assessment centre; where potential coaches are invited to undertake a live coaching session or are asked to submit one or more videos of their coaching practice.

Factor 1: Establishing a clear contract

Rating	Possible behavioural indicators
Moving towards mastery	Coach explains coaching process, their role in it and their expectations of the coachee and organisation to maximise the value of the sessions. Coach jointly agrees the logistical arrangements for the coaching assignment and offers a coaching contract. Coach explains confidentiality with both coach and organisation, who will receive what information, how the coaching will be reviewed and the limits of confidentiality. Coach jointly agrees main themes of the coaching programme with the coachee (and their organisation where appropriate), and if not appropriate for coaching will redirect the coachee (and organisation) to the appropriate intervention or person.
Moving towards competence	Coach explains coaching process and their role in it. Coach explains the logistical arrangements for the coaching assignment. Coach explains confidentiality. Coach asks what the coachee expects from the assignment.
Starting coaching journey	The coach offers a limited explanation, or no explanation, of the what, where, when and how of the coaching process. Coach does not discuss the confidentiality boundaries of the session. The coach does not explore (in advance) the coachee expectations.

Factor 2: Building a trusting relationship

Rating	Possible behavioural indicators
Moving towards mastery	Coach uses themselves as a tool, through personal stories and insights, such stories are always for the benefit on the coachee and are explicitly linked back to the coachee's agenda. Coach openly answers questions raised by the coachee, but does so at a time that facilitates the learning and development of the coachee's insight, without avoiding answering. The coach uses listening, questioning, affirmation, summaries and reflections throughout the coaching session. Coach keeps their commitments made to the coachee (and the organisation).
Moving towards competence	Coach uses themselves as a tool, through sharing personal stories which often help the coachee gain new insights. The coach openly answers questions. The coach uses listening, questioning, summaries and reflections throughout the coaching session. Coach keeps their commitments made to the coachee (and the organisation).
Starting coaching journey	Coach does not provide any personal insights or provides stories which provide learning for the coachee, but their focus is on demonstrating their credibility or expertise as a coach. The coach refuses to answer questions, or agrees to do so, but fails to return to the question during the session. The coach uses a range of communication skills, but often pauses while considering the next question or which direction to follow. Coach makes commitments and promises, but does not always keep to these.

Factor 3: Facilitating agenda

Rating	Possible behavioural indicators
Moving towards mastery	Coach jointly agrees SMART goal/s with the coachee that reflect the length of time available, the themes agreed at the start of the assignment and previous conversation. Coach periodically reviews progress through the session, as well as at the end of the session, appropriately challenging the coachee if the coachee appears not to be fully engaged. Coach uses a range of communication skills to maintain the focus of the coachee on the goal and the pace of the session to complete the task (or agrees otherwise with the coachee). Coach maintains focus of the coaching programme throughout the relationship to help the coachee (and organisation) achieve the wider goals.
Moving towards competence	Coach jointly agrees a goal for the session. Coach reviews the goals at the close of the session, and checks if the coachee feels these have been achieved. Coach uses a range of communication skills to maintain the focus of the coachee. Coach maintains focus of the coaching programme throughout the relationship to help the coachee (and organisation) achieve the wider goals.
Starting coaching journey	Coach invites the coachee to state what they want to discuss. Coach does not refer to the goals during the session and may or may not review these at the end of the session. Coach allows the session to be directed by the coachee, or interrupts and overly directs the focus of the session. Coach allows the session to drift, or are lead off topic by the coachee. Coach follows the lead of the coachee on each session, even if programme goals have been agreed.

Factor 4: Facilitating reflection and learning

Rating	Possible behavioural indicators
Moving towards mastery	Coach uses short and simple open questions throughout the session, which regularly recreates moments of silent reflection for the coachee. Coach actively listens to words and body language and communicates this through their body language and when reflecting back may demonstrate their understanding of the emotions and details of the situation (when appropriate), which can result in silence and/or emotional responses from the coachee. Coach uses complex reflections, such as amplified reflections. Coach summarises to provide breaks, check understanding and support the coachee's learning for the next part of the session and/or help the coachee remain focused/remind them of content. Coach uses affirmation, by reflecting back or making a personal statement which validates the coachee or their work, and which contains a statement of the coach's emotions in response to the situation. Coach uses silence and body language to encourage the coachee to continue thinking or speaking. Coach uses four or more models and blends this together within their coaching practice, adapting to meet the needs of the coachee and their presenting issue.
Moving towards competence	Coach uses open questions, although sometimes the questions are over long or complex, on occasions this recreates moments of silent reflection for the coachee. Coach actively listens to words and body language and uses verbal intonations, eye contact and body language to communicate that they are listening. Coach uses simple reflections. Coach summarises to provide breaks in the session to check understanding and manage the session learning. Coach uses affirmations by reflecting back or making a personal statement, validating the coachee or their work. Coach uses silence to encourage the coachee to continue thinking or continue speaking. Coach uses two or three models within their practice.
Starting coaching journey	Coach uses questions, which include analytical, hypothetical or multiple questions. Coach regularly interrupts the coachee and/or they look distracted by events in their environment or by personal thoughts. Coach uses no or limited reflects back, when used, the coachee corrects at least a third of the time. Coach uses no or limited summarises, when used, the coachee corrects at least a third of the time. Coach uses no or limited affirmations. Coach rarely uses silence as a tool to facilitate the coachee, although they are also silent as they think of their next question. Coach uses a single model or has no obvious framework underpinning their practice.

Factor 5: Managing emotional and organisational boundaries

Rating	Possible behavioural indicators
Moving towards mastery	Coach displays (appropriate) empathic emotional responses to the coachee, and is aware of the individual, the coaching relationship, gender and cultural issues and the social context/environment. Coach contains their own emotions. Coach identifies issues with strong emotional content that require immediate or future referral to other individuals or agencies, and actively works to ensure the coachee does not come to harm. Coach refers skilfully where the issue is beyond the competence of the coach, or where they can identify another coach who could more effectively help the coachee. Coach uses their self-awareness about their own values and beliefs appropriately. Coach manages the boundaries between different stakeholders involved in the process, recognising potential conflict and systemic issues.
Moving towards competence	Coach displays (appropriate) empathic emotional responses to the coachee. Coach contains their own emotions. Coach identifies issues with strong emotional content that require immediate or future referral to other individuals or agencies. Coach refers skilfully where the issue is beyond the competence of the coach. Coach uses their self-awareness about their own values and beliefs appropriately. Coach recognises the boundaries between different stakeholders involved in the process.
Starting coaching journey	Coach does not display emotions or does so beyond those displayed by the coachee. Coach may reveal their own emotions, which are unconnected to the session or the coachee. Coach is willing to talk about any issue presented and try to help. Coach attempts to help the coachee whatever the issue they present. Coach assumes their values and beliefs are shared by the coachee (and organisation). Coach does not consider issues involving multiple stakeholders.

Factor 6: Reviewing outcomes

Rating	Possible behavioural indicators
Moving towards mastery	Coach jointly reviews with the coachee the outcome of the session against the goals and supports further work outside the session, encouraging the coachee to draw support from their manager, friends and colleagues. Coach jointly reviews the outcome of the coaching assignment with the coachee (and the organisation where appropriate) with explicit reference to the original themes agreed. Coach invites feedback at the end of the session, and the end of the assignment from all stakeholders, uses follow up and probing questions to gather behavioural evidence of both 'positives' and 'what could be different next time' and notes feedback for future reflection and learning in their journal. Coach reflects on their and their coachees' behaviours, cognitions or emotions at the end of each session and the end of each assignment and notes these in their journal, as well identifying learning and/or future actions (where appropriate they share this with their supervisor or in their journal). Coach recognises they are on their own learning journey towards mastery and actively seeks new experiences and insights to aid this developmental journey.
Moving towards competence	Coach jointly reviews with the coachee the outcome of the session against the goals. Coach reviews the assignment with the coachee against the original themes. Coach invites feedback at the end of the session and the end of the assignment, and uses probing questions for more detail. Coach reflects at the end of each session, and notes in their journal details of their behaviours, cognitions or emotions. (Where appropriate they share this with their supervisor or in their journal). Coach recognises they are on their own learning journey towards mastery.
Starting coaching journey	Coach does not review the outcome or does without detailed reference to the goals for the session. Coach does not review the assignment against the original coaching themes or undertakes a general review. Coach does not invite feedback or invites feedback and is satisfied with the coachee's general remarks. Coach does not reflect on the events of the session or their behaviours, cognitions or emotions. Coach does not reflect actively on their own learning journey.

Conclusions and recommendations

There is a large variation in understanding between coaches of what constitutes coaching. This is indicative of coaching as an emerging domain, the wide variety of (and lack of) training and the variety of situations to which coaching is being applied. While definitions are inevitably contested, it seems reasonable to expect increasing agreement over the coming decade, as the activity of coaching becomes more professionalised.

There is broad agreement as to the characteristics of good coaching, such as facilitating rather than directing, there are also a minority whose views contradict. Again, complete agreement seems an unlikely prospect. However, this minority may also decrease with increasing professionalisation. Increasing professionalisation and common understanding is not though inevitable. It will depend on engagement from academics and professional bodies with coaches. As well as engagement between coaches who are more qualified and experienced – those who have mastery – and coaches with fewer or no qualifications and less experience – who are more novice. There is an important role here too for qualifications and the expectation from buyers of coaching that coaches will be qualified and be members of a professional coaching body. At an organisational level, those responsible for commissioning coaching interventions would also benefit from academic and professional body engagement, to increase that collective understanding.

More immediately, those people commissioning (either individuals or managers on behalf of their organisation) would benefit from using a structured process in selecting coaches. This need not be sophisticated, similar to our proposed three-stage, ten question approach

For those wishing to add to this process and use an assessment centre method for coach selection, a behaviourally anchored rating scale (BARS) could be useful. BARS offer a more objective and comparable measure between coaches. Our proposed BARS, illustrates what such a scale might look like. Our BARS do not cover all considerations such as the strength of the coach/coachee relationship, whose importance comes through in this research, but may be a useful tool for those commissioning coaching.

Both our proposed ten questions and BARS would benefit from further refinement and validation in a research study, but we hope they provide a basis for further discussion and practice.

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For more information contact Kate Woolgrove
T +44 (0)20 7294 3054
E kate.woolgrove@i-l-m.com

Institute of Leadership
& Management
1 Giltspur Street
London EC1A 9DD

www.i-l-m.com

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