Does Coaching Work? - A Meta-analysis on the Effects of Coaching on Individual

Level Outcomes in an Organizational Context.

A summary for the International Coach Federation

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Summary

Coaching can be defined as 'a result-oriented, systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of life experience and goal-attainment in the personal and/or professional lives of normal, non-clinical clients' (Grant, 2003, p.254). Over the last two decades, the use of coaching methodologies as a means of enhancing performance and development in organizations has increased substantially. Since its foundation in 1995, The International Coach Federation (ICF) has seen its member count grow to over 20,000 members in over 100 countries in 2012 (International Coach Federation, 2012).

While coaching is often considered as a useful tool for individual and organizational development (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh & Parker, 2010), the lack of a quantitative review of research on the outcomes of coaching makes it prone to skepticism (Bono, Purvanova, Towler & Peterson, 2009). With this in mind, we conducted a meta-analysis in order to answer the question whether coaching can be applied effectively in organizational contexts. In our review we focused on five dominant outcomes categories in the broader psychological literature: well-being, coping, work and career related attitudes and goal-directed self-regulation.

In order to decide which studies to include in our analyses we undertook an extensive literature search. We searched for articles 1) that included quantitative data on the effects of coaching, 2) in which coaching was provided by professionally trained external coaches or trained peers, and 3) in which the coachees belonged to a non-clinical population. We screened 107 full articles, of which 18 studies matched our inclusion criteria (see full report for more information on these criteria). All studies that were included in the final analysis are indicated with an * in our list of references. We used Comprehensive Meta-Analysis Software (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins & Rothstein, 2005) to calculate the effect sizes based on the conservative Hedges and Olkin (1985) approach to meta-analysis.

The results show that coaching has significant positive effects on performance and skills, well-being, coping, work attitudes, and goal-directed self-regulation. In general, our meta-analytic findings indicate that coaching is an effective tool for improving the functioning of individuals in organizations:

Outcome	Effectsize
Performance/Skills	.60
Well-being	.46
Coping	.43
Goal-attainment	.74
Work/Career attitudes	.54

Additionally, we found that the robustness of the results varies depending on the research design. Studies that include a control group displayed smaller effects than studies that do not, possibly because control groups allow to control for additional sources of bias such as natural maturation of the coachees (Morris & DeShon, 2002). Furthermore, we point out several methodological issues that need to be addressed in future studies on coaching effectiveness such as the lack of longitudinal investigations and the fact that most studies exclusively rely on self-reports.

Despite its limitations, the current meta-analysis indicates that coaching can be effectively used as an intervention in organizational settings. All in all, we agree with Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006) that it is now time to shift attention from the question 'does it work?' to 'how does it work?'. This second question can only be answered by building a firm theoretical framework that can be used to identify the underlying mechanisms and processes.

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