

Moderating factors of the Van Egmond Coaching Model (VECM)

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Objectives: Identifying those (moderating) factors that are instrumental in the successful completion of a coaching trajectory that is based on the Van Egmond Coaching Model (VECM).

Design: Qualitative.

Methods: Data were collected by means of three questionnaires: a semi-structured questionnaire for the clients; a semi-structured questionnaire for the clients' managers; and a regular evaluation form for the coach. The authors of this paper analysed the data manually, first independently from each other and then again, in a joint session.

Results: The most important moderating factors of the VECM appeared to be the client's readiness to change (will), the client-coach relationship, the manager's role and the coach's expertise.

Conclusions: Most of the outcomes of this study were (structurally) congruous to those of earlier studies. Remarkably, 'relationship' and 'will' were valued higher in this study, and managers assumed their own roles in the success of coaching to be more significant than was perceived by clients. Follow-up studies, particularly into the role of managers, the precise nature and role of the will of clients, the assessment of the client-coach relationship in various contexts, the effects and role of the coach's gender and the extent to which familiarity with the theoretical building blocks of the VECM has an influence on interpreting the coaching effects are recommended.

Keywords: Moderating factors; Evidence-based coaching; Triangle model; Relationship; Will.

COACHING can increasingly be considered a profession because of its social recognition, registration systems and professional associations prescribing professional and ethical codes for their members. However, there are signs that coaches increasingly feel the need to build their practice in a solid theoretical basis and empirically validated models (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). Apparently, the demands of organisations regarding the trustworthiness of coaches and their services force them to expand the boundaries of their professionalism. Consequently, coaching has entered a post-professional phase, according to Drake (2008).

Whereas in the professional phase the focus was placed predominantly on researching the role and identity of coaching, the (application of) coaching interventions, the underlying theories of these interventions and the conditions for – and development of – self-steering, in the post-professional phase the focus is placed on questions such as 'What works when and

how well for whom?' and 'How and why does it work?' and 'Is there any room for improvement?' (Drake, 2008). Coaches are challenged to start working evidence based. The unclearness about the different roles coaches could play in actual practice and the related urge to specialise have increasingly prompted coaches to provide all stakeholders with 'proof' of the effectiveness of their interventions and to account for the choices they have made with regard to their interventions. In addition, coaches apparently need not only to reflect about their work (focusing on theory and practice of their profession), but also to reflectively ask themselves 'Why do I do what I do?', 'What could I do more effectively?' and 'How do theory and practice affect me?'

These reflections require coaches to be prepared to account for the foundation of their professionalism and, consequently, to take steps that go beyond the available know-how, which is based on what is termed 'pop psychology' regarding personal devel-

opment (Grant & Stober, 2006, p.5). Knowledge based on empirical studies (e.g. the effectiveness of their coaching interventions) and the coach's scientific 'mindedness' will have to further broaden the professional expertise, explore the principles of coaching as a discipline, mark the boundaries with related disciplines, such as counselling, mentoring and supervision, and reinforce and increase their credibility for managers.

In order to meet these challenges, empirical and scientific studies in the field of coaching have boomed over the past years. In this context, the focal points were first and foremost internal coaching by managers, external coaching by professionals, coaching as an instrument for determining psychological mechanisms and processes of change in individuals and organisations, and the results, and/or effects and outcomes, of coaching, particularly with an eye to determining return on investment (ROI) (see articles by Evers & Brouwers (2006), Greif (2007), Gyllensten & Palmer (2007), Mackie (2007) and Paige (2002), for example). Following that, it becomes necessary to focus on the moderating factors of coaching (or a specific coaching model) to complement and broaden the (stakeholders' and professional) demands pertaining to effectiveness and outcomes of coaching.

To make a contribution – within the Dutch-speaking region – to the development of a theory on evidence-based work in coaching, a study was conducted by Bouwer and Van Egmond (2009) with regard to the assessment of various aspects of the Van Egmond Coaching Model (VECM). This study primarily aimed to identify the instrumental factors for realising a successful coaching trajectory. The VECM has been developed by Van Egmond (self-employed coach) and has been used (to the appreciation of clients) in coaching trajectories between 2004 and 2009. This paper will first provide a brief introduction to the VECM. Subsequently, it will discuss the set-up, results (limited to the effects and moder-

ating factors of the model), major subjects of discussion and conclusions of this study.

The Van Egmond Coaching Model (VECM)

This section discusses the theoretical building blocks and methodology of the VECM.

Theoretical building blocks

View on coaching. In the VECM, coaching is viewed as a learning process that comprises the 'whole' individual (his/her values, standards and convictions). The overall purpose of coaching is to facilitate people in becoming active which, in turn, leads them to change in such a way that they become more effective in solving their problems. The substantive purpose of coaching is that: (a) the client's goals are achieved; and (b) the client functions in a happier and more effective way, both as a person and as an employee. In this context, the client is responsible for his own learning process, while the coach performs the role of partner in dialogue, assists in identifying appropriate goals and suitable solutions, bolsters confidence and promotes personal development.

View on learning. Learning is understood to mean a process with more or less permanent results and, subsequently, creating new – or changing old – behavioural patterns in the client (Van Parreren, 1971). Learning, therefore, means learning new behaviour and unlearning old behaviour.

Dilts' psychological levels. According to Dilts (1990), six levels serve as a structuring principle for learning, (personal) change, communication and solving problems. These are: environment; behaviour; ability; conviction; identity; and spirituality (see also O'Connor & Seymour, 1993). The VECM focuses predominantly on the first four levels because of its focus on improvement and change. Major questions in this context include: What plan provides the most effective support? How can actual results be

achieved? What are the obstructing or facilitating convictions that stand in the way of positive results?

Transactional Analysis (TA). TA is based on the philosophy that people determine their own fate by taking decisions that can be changed again (Stewart & Joines, 1987). Working with contracts and open communication (transparency) are major principles in this approach. The TA learning process takes place within a triangle contract, in which the coach, client and manager participate. Each triangle contract has three layers, i.e. the procedural layer (frequency, duration of sessions, investment, payment and meeting place), the professional layer (agreements on goals, results, and roles of the three participants) and the psychological layer (underlying dynamics in the contract between the three parties on the basis of which the hidden agendas can be made explicit). Within the VECM, the managers' roles are not limited to the contracting phase, but expanded to two or three evaluation moments during the trajectory. The objective is to make explicit the implicit expectations of the three parties and to harmonise them with each other. The success of a coaching trajectory is tested first and foremost against the progress and development of set objectives and results.

The GROW model. In each session, the working method of the VECM is determined on the basis of four basic principles of GROW (Goal, Reality, Options and Wrapping up; Whitmore, 2002). In addition, goals are formulated as the desired result in behavioural terms.

Maslow's learning cycle. Maslow introduced four phases in his learning model, i.e. unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence and unconscious competence (Maslow, 1954). The VECM aims to increase the client's consciousness by, for example, identifying obstructing convictions or letting the client

collect his own feedback on his own performance. Key elements are 'becoming conscious' (of survival mechanisms) and 'unlearning and learning' (of old and new behaviour). The phenomenon of 'reflection' also deserves attention. This is understood to mean reflecting on one's actions and steps to be taken as well as on one's own presuppositions, expectations and intentions. The related reflection reports enable the client to observe, steer and understand (obtaining insight). It is essential that the client makes a link between understanding and taking action.

Mobilising the will. The will is one of the most crucial factors for a coaching trajectory to be successful. This understanding is derived from the range of thoughts of psychosynthesis, founded by Roberto Assagioli (Ferruci, 1991). Mobilising the will stimulates the client's own responsibility and self-steering. During the entire coaching trajectory, the VECM checks and mobilises the client's will by repeatedly determining – in consultation with the client – what the next step will be, explaining the method to be used and always letting the client make choices with regard to intended actions.

Methodology

The methodical structure of the VECM is as follows.

The client: (a) Intake; (b) recurring elements in each session include determining goals, becoming conscious and translating these goals into reality, which results in proposed decisions with regard to new behaviour; and (c) evaluation. The evaluation, in its turn, consists of three elements:

- Intake and the client's related individual plan;
- Reflection and action report (on lessons learned and proposed decisions on new behaviour);
- Evaluation of coaching results (checking the development process and achievement of goals), the process (the coach's

contribution and other factors, such as duration and number of sessions) and the need for further development.

The client's manager: (a) Intake; (b) interim evaluation; and (c) evaluation after completion of the coaching trajectory.

The coach: After each session, the coach writes evaluation reports and sends these to the clients for reasons of comparison and stimulation of their learning process.

A coaching session lasts two hours on average. A coaching trajectory takes six sessions on average, with an intervening period of at least one month. This period is usually required to put lessons learned into practice.

Study design

We describe the study design by reviewing objectives and questions, the nature of the method, respondents, instruments, procedure and analysis.

Objectives and questions

The study *objective* was to identify the moderating factors of the VECM. The related *questions* and subquestions were as follows.

Main question: What factors contribute to a successful completion of a coaching trajectory which is based on the VECM?

Subquestions: What are the theoretical building blocks of the VECM? According to which method does the VECM work? How do clients, managers (i.e. the client's supervisors) and coach assess the coaching trajectory? Which aspects of the model can be considered moderating factors?

Method

Our study was conducted by sending semi-structured questionnaires to respondents and their managers after completion of a coaching trajectory. The trajectories were monitored in the period from September 2008 to October 2009.

Respondents

We asked four clients and their managers to complete the questionnaires. One duo worked for the municipality of a medium-sized town, one with an international accountancy firm, and the other two for a regional training centre (ROC) in the Netherlands.

The clients were two men and two women. Their average age was 43.25 years. The managers were also two men and two women.

Instruments

As stated above, the data were collected by means of three questionnaires: a semi-structured questionnaire for the clients; a semi-structured questionnaire for the clients' managers; and a regular evaluation form for the coach.

The developed questionnaires for clients and supervisors were based on the regular evaluations of the VECM, the interview list used by Gyllensten and Palmer (2007, p.177) in their study of client-coaching relationship, and Mackie's (2007, p.317) evaluation methodology of the coaching process.

Questionnaires characteristics

Client's questionnaire: This questionnaire consisted of 94 items, 14 of which were assessments on the Lickert-type scale and the remainder of which were open questions. The questionnaire was divided into the following main categories: biographical information, reason to participate in a coaching trajectory, client, coach, manager, characteristics of coaching, coaching process, coaching method, results, overall evaluation and assessment of the coaching trajectory and major factors that led to the achievement of the formulated goals.

Manager's questionnaire: This questionnaire consisted of 14 items with the following main categories: evaluation of the coaching process, coach, reason to participate in a coaching trajectory and factors that led to a successful completion of the coaching trajec-

tory. Two questions were assessments on the Lickert-type scale and the remainder were open questions.

Coach's evaluation form: The questionnaire used by the coach to evaluate the trajectories consisted of 16 questions with the following main categories: general information, result of the coaching trajectory, coaching process and the client's further personal development.

Procedure

After completion of the coaching trajectories (i.e. during the coach's end evaluation, in which it became apparent that the coaching trajectories were completed with a high level of appreciation, so we can speak of successful trajectories), clients and their supervisors were asked whether they were prepared to participate in this study. Upon receiving agreement from the clients and their supervisors, we sent the questionnaires to the respondents by email, one week after completion of the coaching trajectory. The completed lists were returned by email as well.

Analysis

The authors of this paper analysed the data manually, first independently from each other and then again, in a joint session. Answers to open ended questions – especially with regard to the perceived moderating factors – were analysed on the basis of the ranking (in importance) allocated to them by the respondents.

Results

As stated above, the results portrayed here, are limited to assessments of the perceived *positive effects* of the coaching trajectory and the related moderating factors. Only scores and ratings with an 80 per cent+ value are represented below. The views of each of the three parties in the VECM (client, manager and coach) will be discussed next.

The client

From the data, we abstracted the following information on the effects and moderating factors of the coaching trajectory.

Effects of the coaching trajectory

- (a) The respondents gave themselves an 83 per cent chance that they will not revert to their old, unlearned, behaviour. They indicated they could better deal with problems, had more self-confidence and a greater understanding of their behavioural patterns. Feedback from the (working) environment confirmed changes in various areas (e.g. improved communication, more efficient behaviour, more assertive in contacts and setting limits).
- (b) 100 per cent felt they had grown as a person (autonomy).
- (c) 100 per cent felt their stress levels had decreased. Some experienced physical changes (fewer headaches). Others experienced less stress and were much more relaxed and at ease than before. This was also the case in their home environment.
- (d) 100 per cent perceived that set goals had been achieved.
- (e) Negative effects were not given. One respondent, however, stated there was a risk of dependency on the coach.

Moderating factors

According to the clients, the most important (generic) moderating factors were as follows (average valuation in brackets).

- (a) The client's personal commitment (working hard) (91 per cent)*.
- (b) The client-coach relationship (90 per cent).
- (c) The readiness to change (will) (88 per cent)*.
- (d) The coach's skills (85 per cent).

*One could argue that the readiness to change (c) forms an integral part of the client's personal commitment (a). In other words, the will is the motivation to work hard

so as to achieve set goals. When combining the two, the client-coach relationship would be considered the most important moderating factor and personal commitment would follow in second place, with only a very small difference (0.5 per cent).

On a *methodical level*, the clients stated several factors as important interventions for achieving their goals. These were as follows.

- The direct way in which the problem is confronted.
- Learning to formulate questions and solutions independently.
- Taking time to recognise one's own instruments and lessons to be learned.
- Practical exercises (interventions) used by the coach when discussing the effects of the interventions.

The clients' manager

Effects of the coaching trajectory

According to the managers, the coaching trajectory had the following effects.

- (a) The client is more relaxed as a person, has more control over his own emotions, is more at ease and more cheerful.
- (b) With regard to work, the client shows more initiative, has more self-confidence, has more problem-solving abilities and is more conscious when dealing with the 'warm' side of others.

In addition, the managers estimate the chance that clients would not revert to their old and ineffective behaviour 73 per cent.

Moderating factors

According to the managers, the major moderating factors are as follows.

- (a) The client's readiness to change.
- (b) A supporting supervisor.
- (c) The client-coach relationship*.
- (d) An expert coach*.

In this context, it should be noted that the managers valued the impact of their own involvement and/or role in a successful coaching trajectory of their employees with an 82 per cent score. The clients, however,

valued the impact of their managers' role with a 60 per cent score.

*Please note in this context that one of the major tasks of an (expert) coach is to build up a good relationship with clients. If these two aspects (c) and (d) were combined, the relationship may have ranked second place.

The coach

Effects of the coaching trajectory

A high degree of congruity to the study data can be seen when comparing the evaluation forms the clients completed at the coach's request after completion of the coaching trajectory. This applies particularly to the effects on a personal and functional level, the importance of personal commitment and the perception that the coaching trajectory meets the learning needs.

Moderating factors

The coach finds the following factors essential for an effective or successful coaching trajectory.

- (a) The client's readiness (will) to change.
- (b) The relationship.
- (c) The coach's own expertise and professionalism.
- (d) Linked to (c), monitoring the process. Target-oriented working is essential in this context.

Discussion

A striking element in this study is that each of the three parties considered the major success factors for achieving the set goals to be the client's readiness (will) to change and his full commitment, the client-coach relationship and the coach's expertise. The clients' managers added a fourth factor (and valued it very highly), i.e. their own role in a successful coaching trajectory.

The manager's role. This aspect has never before been explicitly included in a study in the Netherlands. However, due to the extent to which the clients themselves valued this factor, it cannot be ranked in the top five of

moderating factors of coaching trajectories. In studies conducted in English-speaking countries, however, this aspect has been identified as a major item with regard to evaluating professional development. Guskey (1991) has stated that 'organisational support' is an essential element of professional development (see also Paige, 2002, p.66). The reason for the low valuation of their supervisors' roles in the success of clients' professional development may be the specific authority structures in Dutch organisations (egalitarian), the labour laws of this country (high level of employee protection) and its culture of individualism (autonomy and responsibility). At any rate, contrary to Guskey's (1991) study, Dutch clients do not indicate that they do not feel supported by their organisations or supervisors. They apparently experience support, but the valuation of their managers' specific roles is rationalised.

The will. This aspect is congruous to, for example, Greif's analysis (2007, p.243). He regards clients' 'change readiness' and 'persistence' as two important factors for achieving their goals. This will have to be discussed explicitly in future studies for many studies on coaching results aim predominantly to generate information on overall outcomes such as the extent to which set goals have been achieved. Some studies, however, also focus on measuring changes in affect, subjective well-being and happiness with life. In addition, researchers also focus on specific outcomes such as understanding and self-reflection, individual, social and functional characteristics, and the valuation of effects on an individual level (Greif, 2007, pp.224–226). So far, however, they have somewhat neglected the conative aspect (the will). The present study into the VECM correlates with Greif's analysis and shows that the clients' will and readiness to change are regarded as essential by all respondents.

On all sides, the *relationship* is regarded as an essential moderating factor in any coaching trajectory. In this context, trust and

transparency are considered key coordinates (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007, p.174). In the area of psychotherapy, the relationship in coaching situations has been studied to a large extent. One of the findings was that the therapist's qualities, facilitating conditions (e.g. empathy) and the relationship are major factors that influence the outcomes of therapies (O'Brien & Palmer, 2006). Mackie is of the opinion that the study of psychotherapy outcomes cannot be applied to coaching uncritically. He refers particularly to the methodology used to determine the outcomes (randomised, controlled trials versus case studies) (2007, pp.316–317). Coaching will have to build up its own body of knowledge. However, the few studies that have been conducted within the domain of coaching still show that an open, supporting, and healthy coach relationship is a major success factor (Schmidt, 2003). This has also been confirmed in the present study, the relationship being linked mostly to trusting the coach and having a 'click' with the coach.

The coach. In the literature, the personal and professional characteristics of an effective coach are mostly linked to the skill of establishing a strong connection between client and coach, the coach's professionalism and the use of an unambiguous method (Wasylyshyn, 2003). Greif adds to this that the coach's professional credibility and the coach's ability to make the client's goals and expectations explicit are key aspects for an eventual coaching success (2007, p.243). In the present study, the coach was praised particularly for her empathy and genuine interest, ability to listen, methodical approach (having clients do exercises), good timing and professionalism. Seventy-five per cent felt that gender also played an important part in the success of coaching. With regard to the coach's role as a moderating factor, earlier studies are, therefore, congruous to the present study.

Conclusions and recommendations

Due to the size of the cohort of respondents, the results cannot be generalised. However, attempts to optimise reliability were made by first conducting two analyses independently from each other, followed by a joint analysis. Various aspects of the analyses are consistent with earlier studies. For example, the client's readiness to change, the client-coach relationship and the coach's professionalism as important moderating factors of coaching. A striking aspect of the current study is that readiness to change is valued higher than in any other study. Another striking aspect is the way in which managers rank their own role in a successful coaching trajectory. This is not congruous to earlier studies. At any rate, it is not entirely clear what exactly they wish to communicate by that.

We recommend conducting further studies into the following.

- (a) A substantiation of the perceived role of managers (c.q. supervisors) as a moderating factor of the VECM.
- (b) The precise nature and role of the will of clients with regard to achieving set goals in a coaching trajectory.
- (c) The causes and effects of the fact that the client-coach relationship as a success factor was valued higher in this study than in, for example, the Wasylyshyn study (90 per cent and 83 per cent, respectively).
- (d) The effects and role of the coach's gender in successful coaching trajectories.
- (e) The fact that each of the three parties drew virtually the same conclusions with regard to the nature of coaching, the coach's characteristics and methodology. There is a strikingly high level of consistency between these conclusions and the theoretical building blocks of the VECM (which in itself may be interpreted positively, but it may also be an indication that desirable answers were given).

To conclude

Against a background of increasing pressure on coaches to work evidence based, this paper discussed results of a study that was conducted into identifying the moderating factors of the Van Egmond Coaching Model (VECM). Coaches are increasingly prompted to provide managers with proof of the effects of their coaching model. First, the paper explained the seven building blocks and methodology of the VECM. The building blocks comprise views on coaching and learning, the ranges of thoughts of Dilts, Stewart and Joines, Whitmore, Maslow, and Assagioli. The methodology shows a clearly demarcated structure in which the standard is to work with reflection and evaluation reports. Subsequently, the design of the study (objectives and questions, method, respondents, procedure, results of analysis and conclusions) was discussed. As stated above, this study aimed to identify the most important moderating factors of the VECM. For this purpose, the three parties of this model (client, manager and coach) completed semi-structured questionnaires after completion of four coaching trajectories. The most important moderating factors of the VECM were the client's readiness to change (the will), the client-coach relationship, the manager's role and the coach's expertise. When discussing the results, we established that most of the outcomes were (structurally) congruous to those of earlier studies. The will as a key factor was particularly evident in this study, more so than in any other study. We recommend conducting follow-up studies, particularly into the role of managers, the precise nature and role of the will of clients, the assessment of the client-coach relationship in various contexts, the effects and role of the coach's gender and the extent to which familiarity with the theoretical building blocks of the VECM has an influence on interpreting the coaching effects.

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