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periodical for professional exchange and networking

European Journal
for Supervision and Coaching

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Change process beyond goals:

The client in the context of the working alliance in coaching

■ Tünde Erdős

Abstract

How to foster (more) effective coaching partnerships? In this article, in fact a report on her recent PHD-research, executive coach and coaching scientist Tünde Erdős sets out to address this issue. Combining the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of studying clients' self-reports and coach-client dyadic interactions in three separate datasets as well as focusing on both the role of non-verbal cues and the dynamics of intra-personal patterns of emotion, attitude and behaviour, she shows how the working alliance between coach and coachee may enhance – but in some instances also hinder– the self-regulation and learning process in coaching. With this practice-informed study she helps practitioners to understand the power of the non-verbal relationship and to build up awareness of their state of presence. Next to that, she concludes with her findings and strong suggestions for further research.

Introduction

Late 2016, I experienced what felt to me a failure moment in my executive coaching practice. I became aware that despite a well-anchored career as an accredited executive coach there was apparently still something 'critical' that I did not quite understand about the impact that my physicality was having on a client of mine. My unconscious physical responses appeared as not congruent with what I was saying in a session, which my client described as a source of 'feeling unsafe'. That feedback ignited my curiosity to explore coach-client nonverbal interactional processes, how the coach-client relationship influences clients' capacity to feel safe, and how clients contribute to their own change process. The purpose was to contribute to coaching knowledge on clients' growth and learning beyond a specific goal.



At the outset of my research work, I became aware that I was tapping into uncharted territory in coaching with very little knowledge I could use to navigate my 'not knowing'. The biggest challenge was revealing what I did not expect to find, appreciating serendipity as the most valuable contribution both in research and practice.

How to go about it? Applying the process-oriented lens, the qualitative meta-synthesis (Erdős, de Haan, & Heusinkveld, 2020) initially resulted in comprehensively mapping client attributes and the role of these attributes in clients' change process to reveal their dynamic patterned interconnectivity (IRM, Figure 1).

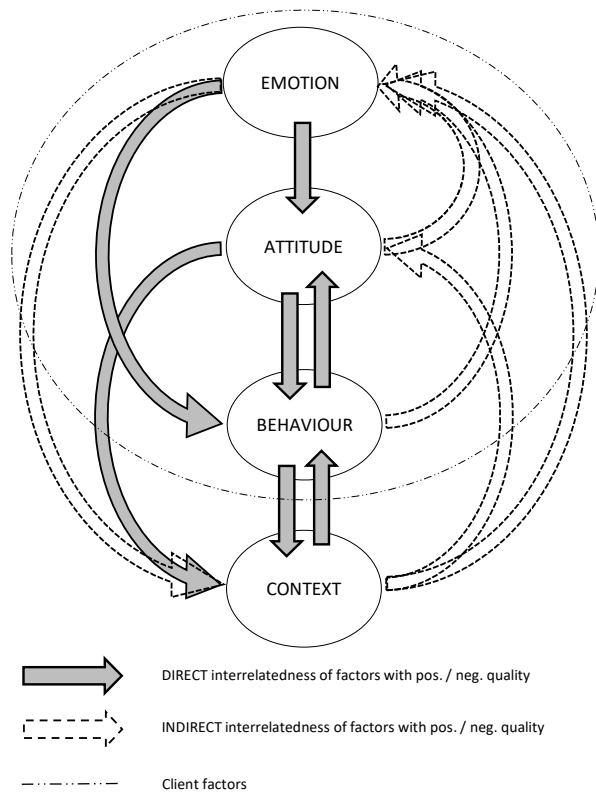


Figure 1. Integrative Relationship Model (IRM) of client and contextual factors

Notes. Direct interrelatedness is implied when one factor impacts directly on the other as reported in the studies. Indirect interrelatedness is implied when one factor impacts on another factor via a third factor as reported in the studies. Positive and negative quality of interrelatedness is deduced from descriptors used in verbatim quotes. Constant comparison of direct and indirect as well as positive and negative dimensional dynamics across all study types identified how dimensions (emotion, attitude, behavior and contingencies) are embedded in coaching. A transcending non-linear process reveals patterned shifts for clients in the coaching process as observed in the domain of personality process theory but not yet fully understood and explained in coaching as a socially constructed change process. In analogy to "Personality Processes: Mechanisms by which Personality Traits 'Get Outside the Skin'" by S. Hampson (2012), *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63, 315–33.

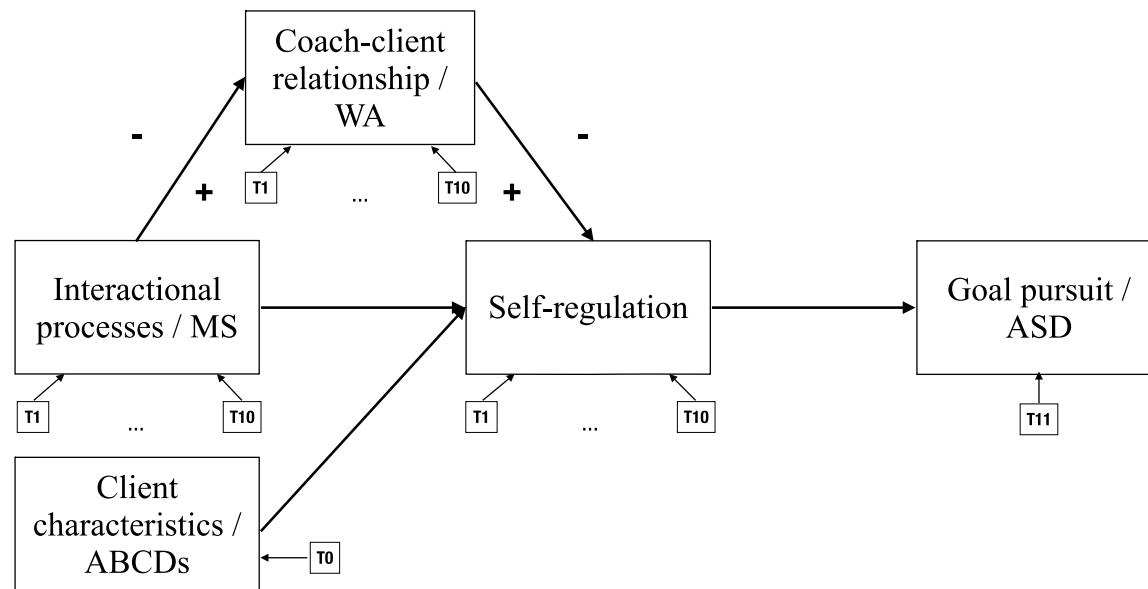
Next, IRM formed the basis for investigating three core themes as having the capacity to affect clients' dynamic change process beyond goals, as follows:

- (a) role of clients' self-regulation;
- (b) dynamics of movement synchrony (MS) as coach-client nonverbal interactional processes;
- (c) role of working alliance (WA) as the quality of the coach-client relationship (Bordin, 1979).

Generally, coaching was conceptualized as a process-oriented activity (Greif, 2017), and the three core

themes were altogether covered in two unique quantitative approaches and a third exploratory investigation. Figure 2 provides an overview of the entire research project while Table 1 summarizes all research questions and key findings per empirical approach.

This article details how the findings relate to each core theme and next discusses possible implications and recommendations for coaching science and practice in the future.



Note. Basic prediction model indicating client characteristics in association with self-regulation; Self-regulation in association with coach / client interactional processes and goal pursuit / ASD; coach-client relationship as a process variable. T1 indicates first measurement point, T10 indicates the last measurement point. T0 indicates the pre-coaching assessment of client characteristics, while T11 indicates that post-coaching assessment of goal measures three months after completion of coaching

Figure 2. Overview of basic prediction model

Table 1. Summary of research questions and findings

| Approach | Research question | Key findings |
|--|--|---|
| Qualitative Meta-Synthesis | <p>Q1: Which client factors and contextual factors reported in primary qualitative studies are relevant for coaching effectiveness?</p> <p>Q2: How do primary qualitative studies suggest that these factors interrelate in clients' learning as a context-sensitive and dynamic change process?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data analysis produced three client-related aggregate dimensions: emotion, attitude, and behavior, as well as context as the fourth dimension; the meta-synthesis indicates that we have insufficient focus on the client with a specific emotionality as the majority of studies investigate behavior as a goal-attainment measure. - The Integrative Relationship Model (IRM) indicates that client's experiences can be conceptualized from (a) a lens of dynamic interrelatedness as clients undergo their change process, and (b) a nuanced perspective of dynamic interrelatedness as they emerge in client's social contexts. - IRM maps that dimensions interrelate dynamically in that either one dimension directly relates to another dimension, or in that one dimension relates to another dimension via a third dimension. |
| Quantitative study on ABCDs of the Big Five in Authentic Self-Development | =D6:D7RQ3: How do the ABCDs of clients' Big Five personality traits impact client's authentic self-development as explained by affect balance? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both the Big Five trait levels of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Extraversion, and Openness as well as the psychological components of these traits (i.e., ABCDs: Affect, Behavior, Cognition, Desire) predicted three out of four aspects of authentic self-development (i.e., higher levels of perceived competence, goal commitment, goal self-concordance but not goal stability); - The 2-1-2 multilevel path models showed that the overall affect balance over sessions rather than the change in affect balance explained the direct relationship between personality and two aspects of authentic self-development: perceived competence and goal commitment, but not self-concordance and goal stability. |
| Quantitative study on Movement Synchrony and Working Alliance as a Moderator | <p>Q4: What is the impact of nonverbal synchrony (spontaneous movement coordination) on client's self-regulation capacities as operationalized through self-reported affect balance?</p> <p>Q5: What is the impact of nonverbal synchrony (spontaneous movement coordination) on client's self-regulation capacities as operationalized through result-oriented problem and self-reflection?</p> <p>Q6: What is the impact of self-regulation on client's goal-directed behavior in coaching as operationalized through affect balance?</p> <p>Q7: What is the impact of self-regulation on client's goal-directed behavior in coaching as operationalized through result-oriented problem and self-reflection?</p> <p>Q8: How does working alliance moderate the direct effects of nonverbal synchrony on client's self-regulation (operationalized through result-oriented problem and self-reflection as well as positive and negative affect) in coaching?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the high-outcome group (top 33% of goal attainment), synchrony had no significant association with any other variable in both temporal as well as contemporaneous networks. - In the mid-level outcome group (mid 33% of goal-attainment), there were positive associations between synchrony and bonding in working alliance in the contemporaneous network and positive associations between synchrony and task-focus in working alliance and goal-orientation in the between-network analyses. - In the low-outcome group (low 33% of goal-attainment), there were negative associations between synchrony and task-focus in working alliance in the temporal network analyses as well as negative associations between synchrony and cognitive self-regulation in the between-network analyses. - The mid-outcome subsample provided the highest number of associations in the temporal network: Synchrony negatively predicted positive affect, goal-reflection, all aspects of working alliance, and it was negatively predicted by concreted changes in cognitive self-regulation. For the contemporaneous network, there was a negative association with bonding in working alliance and a positive association with self-organisation in cognitive self-regulation. The between-network analysis indicated that synchrony and negative affect were negatively associated across dyads. - A lower level of synchrony in a previous session predicted higher task-orientation, higher goal-setting, and higher goal-reflection in the next session. - Higher positive affect predicts higher goal attainment - Higher goal-reflection predicts higher goal attainment - Clients reported low levels of bonding in working alliance in sessions with high levels of nonverbal synchrony - Interaction effects in mixed model analyses showed that the effect of nonverbal synchrony on cognitive self-regulation (RoPS) largely depended on the expression of working alliance as well as mood as moderators; In dyads with high working alliance, nonverbal synchrony appears not to act as a beneficial factor for other process variables, while dyads with low working alliance showed a positive connection between synchrony and cognitive self-regulation. - There is a clear downward trend in movement synchrony over time in the cluster that completed 10 sessions and the cluster with 173 dyads completing varying number of sessions. The downward trends are indicative of differential change in movement synchrony over time. The difference lies in that the cubic curve type suggests a slight increase in movement synchrony both at the outset of the coaching engagement and at the end of the coaching trajectory. This difference is more evident in the cluster that involved N = 173 dyads. - No significant correlations or covariances between and among the groups of best fitting curve types and the demographic variables of coach / client gender, client |
| Exploratory study on movement synchrony over time | Q9: How does nonverbal synchrony (spontaneous movement coordination) develop over time per session and dyadic interaction? | |

Key Findings per core theme

The role of clients' self-regulation

While the coaching literature has not yet investigated self-regulation as a process of psychological functioning per se, some client attributes such as resilience have been explored as a specific outcome (e.g., de Haan et al., 2020; MacKie, 2015; Molyn et al., 2019). Recently, a study (de Haan et al., 2019) measured resilience at multiple data points, finding that resilience contributed to coaching effectiveness.

Thus, addressing self-regulation as a process of psychological functioning answered claims that coaching is "essentially about helping individuals regulate and direct their interpersonal and intrapersonal resources in order to create purposeful and positive change in their personal or business lives." (Grant, 2012, p. 149).

First, the principle of self-regulation was reflected in IRM (Figure 1) as it became apparent how the client-specific dimensions of emotion, attitude, and behavior are interconnected as an intrapersonal process framed by contextual factors such as the coach-client relationship in relatively consistent dynamic patterns. However, while we can find some support for this intrapersonal process in quantitative research (e.g., MacKie, 2015), IRM specifically carved out that emotion (i.e., fear, anger, uncertainty, excessive affect) is a client attribute that is heavily under-researched and under-theorized in coaching. It is a development which latest neuroscience research into emotion corroborates (Feldman-Barrett, 2017) too. The current state of play in coaching research may be due to how scholars have placed the focus on more easily measurable factors such as clients' behavior and cognitive processes to understand shifts in behavior for goal attainment. In contrast, IRM with its focus on the dynamic intrapersonal

nal patterns of emotion, attitude and behavior provided a possible regulatory framework to address the issue of inconsistent effectiveness that coaches encounter when applying certain techniques (e.g., GROW model) that prove to be effective with some clients while they remain ineffective with some others.

Consequently, the second focal step aimed to address clients' emotionality (i.e., affective and cognitive self-regulatory capacity) as an under-researched phenomenon in clients' change process. In two quantitative approaches and applying an input-process-output approach (e.g., Ianiro & Kauffeld, 2014), the goal was to balance efforts in making meaning of the client both as the 'whole person' (Taylor, 1998) and some individual facets of the client (e.g., mood, attitude).

The first quantitative approach sampled 176 clients measuring the emotional perspective of their self-regulation in workplace settings around the globe. Specifically, clients' personality was associated with their authentic self-development (ASD) as explained by affect balance (AB) on the basis of the Self-Regulation Resource Model (SRRM, Sirois & Hirsch, 2015) that has been previously used to explain the links between personality and health behaviors. Clients' personality was conceptualized as a set of affective, cognitive, behavioral and motivational dimensions (ABCDs, Wilt & Revelle, 2015) of the Big Five personality traits (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Authentic Self Development (ASD) was framed as the ultimate expression of clients' growth beyond any specific goal comprising perceived competence, goal-commitment, goal self-concordance, and goal stability as specific measures of ASD. Conceptually, the coherence of patterned dynamics of the ABCD

personality dimensions was hoped to explain how and why certain traits are likely to lead to outcomes (e.g., O'Neill & Steel, 2017). Moreover, studying personality traits by covering the balanced conceptual content of traits (e.g., Pytlik Zillig et al., 2002) was proposed to be a meaningful way forward to shed light on how clients self-regulate in their striving for ASD.

Authentic Self Development was framed as the ultimate expression of clients' growth beyond any specific coaching goal

This first approach produced the following key finding on the role of clients' emotional self-regulation:

- (a) The overall Affect Balance (AB) over sessions rather than the change in AB explained the relationship between personality and two aspects of ASD: perceived competence and goal commitment, but not self-concordance and goal stability. It seems that more AB does not lead to higher self-regulation, but constant AB does.
- (b) The ABCDs predicted three out of four aspects of ASD (i.e., higher levels of perceived competence, goal commitment, goal self-concordance but not goal stability), which may be owing to the balanced representation of ABCDs. Goal stability was not influenced by AB. This finding supports clients' capacity to pursue goal-directed behavior without any rigid adherence to goals.

In the second more complex quantitative approach (Erdös & Ramseyer, 2021), clients' self-regulation was measured as a meta-cognitive monitoring ability (Greif & Berg, 2011). This ability integrates result-oriented problem- and self-reflection (RoPS) and emotion regulation through AB (Hayes & Feldman, 2004) in the coach-client relationship as clients' most immediate context. Movement Synchrony (MS) was associated with goal attainment as explained by clients' affective and cognitive self-regulation and this association was predicted to be strengthened or weakened by Working Alliance (WA).

184 coach-client dyads comprised an international sample of real clients engaging in workplace coaching with professional coaches. These dyads were videotaped and their interactions in terms of MS were analyzed using Motion Energy Analysis (MEA, Ramseyer, 2020). Clients reported on their self-regulation capacities after each session while coaches were interviewed after completion of the coaching process to complement findings through video analyses.

Goal attainment was conceptualized as clients' engagement in sustained goal-directed behavior (Bachkirova & Smith, 2015). This goal striving perspective finds support in coaching literature (e.g., Schiemann, Mühlberger, & Jonas, 2018b) suggesting that coaching effectiveness is ultimately about clients' attaining autonomy beyond goals.

The complex temporal and network models used to analyze self-regulation produced differential findings with huge implications for coaching science and practice in the future (Erdös, 2021; Erdös & Ramseyer, 2021). In terms of the role of self-regulation, these models revealed the following key findings:

(a) The effect of MS on clients' cognitive self-regulation largely depended on Working Alliance (WA) and emotional self-regulation. Surprisingly, dyads with low WA showed a positive association between MS and cognitive self-regulation. This dynamic pattern explains the relevance that clients' context plays in their change process.

(b) MS may negatively influence cognitive self-regulation, which impacts clients' capacity of goal-directed behavior (see 'The dynamics of movement synchrony' for details).

(c) Lower MS in a previous session predicted higher cognitive self-regulation in the next session. This temporal effect can be explained by the role that coaching plays as a self-regulatory mechanism per se.

(d) Higher positive affect and higher cognitive self-regulation predicted higher capacity to pursue goal-directed behavior three months after coaching.

The dynamics of movement synchrony

MS was conceptualized as interlocutors' spontaneous responsiveness to each other through movement as theoretically framed by interpersonal movement coordination (IMC, Bernieri & Rosenthal, 1991) drawing on psychotherapy literature (Ramseyer, 2020). To date, the coaching literature has not explored MS to predict clients' self-regulation. Therefore, the second quantitative approach explored the interaction effects of MS on clients' affective and cognitive self-regulatory capacity as influenced by WA in goal pursuit behaviors. Conceptually, this approach is supported by the dynamical systems perspective in social psychology (Kelso, 1995) as MS reflects the nature of coaching as an interactional change process that is complex and adaptive at the macro-level of coaching too.

The findings on the dynamics of MS are equally differential and can be categorized as follows:

(a) Initially high MS showed a linear trend for a temporal decrease, albeit in a complex manner. Specifically, the effect of MS on clients' cognitive self-regulation largely depended on the expression of WA. The complex effects may be explained by both WA and MS being interactional process variables each with their specific level of dynamic interrelatedness at the micro-level of coaching.

(b) Low MS in a previous session predicted higher WA and higher cognitive self-regulation in the next session. These associations may indicate some "correctional mechanism" that emerges at a point where progress is perceived to "get off track" (i.e., clients report low self-regulation and low WA). Higher MS indicates emerging efforts to correct the deteriorating quality of the coach-client relationship or the yet unproductive coaching process. Where WA is strong (i.e., shared goal/task focus, bonding), it appears irrelevant whether or not coach and client are synched in, while MS becomes necessary where WA is poor.

(c) Low MS is associated with high goal attainment; high MS is associated with low goal attainment and low goal orientation as one aspect of WA; medium goal attainment is not associated with overall positive or negative affect over time. These differential findings explain findings (a) and (b) above that MS can help and harm clients' change process. Placing the focus on creating an authentic environment may be more beneficial to clients as there are too many factors that interact in the coaching process to make full sense of clients' change process.

A third complementary approach further addressed the dynamics of MS in coaching exploring how average MS evolved from session to session per dyadic interaction. In applying cross-correlation and discriminant analyses, the purpose was to enhance our understand-

ing of MS as it changed for dyads across session to highlight the extent to which the number of sessions factors in connection with client age, coach/client gender, or coaches' years of experience. The sample comprised a) the cluster of dyads that completed 10 sessions, and b) 173 dyadic interactions with a varied number of sessions. Digging deeper into the serial

Movement synchrony is not associated with demographic variables, it is rather an interactional phenomenon

representation of MS is relevant as latest psychotherapy research has produced heterogeneous associations between nonverbal synchrony and WA and rather homogeneous results when it comes to therapeutic success (Ramseyer, 2020b; Lutz et al., 2020). This exploratory approach produced the following results:

(a) MS showed a downward trend in the coaching process, albeit with variations (i.e., linear downward, cubic, and quadratic best curve fits), the differential change showing in a slight increase in MS both at the outset and at the end of the coaching trajectory.

(b) The development of MS is not associated with demographic variables, which may be explained by MS being an interactional phenomenon rather than a factor that is correlational with demographic variables.

(c) The lack of correlation/covariance between

the development of MS and the number of sessions may mean that additional sessions or weeks of coaching do not impact up and that even short-term coaching may have a beneficial impact on clients' goal attainment. However, there may be other factors (i.e., gravity of a coaching issue) that account for the differential change in MS as an interactional phenomenon.

The role of working alliance

Following the most recent theoretical position in coaching (Graßmann et al., 2020), WA was conceptualized as an interpersonal variable that is likely to strengthen or weaken – that is moderate – the association between MS and clients' self-regulation.

This approach is novel in coaching research and reinforces the debate around the contextual role of WA in coaching as a change process (Molyn et al., 2019). Some scholars (e.g., Cavanagh, 2013) call for greater contextualization coaching while elsewhere in the coaching literature (Bachkirova et al., 2015) contextual factors are argued to not significantly influence coaching outcomes.

In fact, the contextual role of WA as a moderator is supported by change process theory in coaching (e.g. Cox, 2013), and is established in mentoring (Larose et al., 2010) and counseling (Masdonati, et al., 2014). These coaching-related fields demonstrate that the nature of WA can change over time and therefore is likely to produce varying effects on outcomes. Yet, this debate is not surprising. Indeed, contradictory indications about the role of WA in coaching may be attributable to coaching in itself being a beneficial process, which may have contributed to how WA has been conceptualized to explain coaching success in the majority of coaching studies to date.

The second quantitative approach produced the following findings on WA as a moderator:

- (a) Dyads with low WA showed a positive association between MS and cognitive self-regulation, while in dyads with high WA, lower MS was associated with higher cognitive self-regulation. This moderation effect implies that in the absence of task-setting, goal orientation and bonding as markers of WA, MS is likely to repair a process that is off track (i.e., goals are not clearly set, goal-oriented path is not shared by coach and client, low rapport).
- (b) Surprisingly, the opposite was true for Affect Balance (AB): In dyads with high AB, higher MS predicted higher cognitive self-regulation, while in dyads with low AB, low MS predicted higher cognitive self-regulation. This explains the relevance of emotion as a key factor that strengthens how coach and client spontaneously respond to each other as clients feel capacitated to build up their cognitive resources to focus on result-oriented problem- and self-reflection (RoPS).

Theoretical implications & future research **Clients' self-regulation as sustained psychological functioning**

As a result of IRM, investigating positive emotion as a predictor of heightened awareness appears to be relevant. All the more, as positive emotion is posited to be an important factor for action taking in coaching (e.g., Grant, 2014). This position is corroborated in the broaden-and-build-theory (Frederickson, 2001) suggesting that positive emotions are likely to expand awareness towards new action taking and 'trying out new things'. As a result of the first quantitative approach, there are at least three implications that may advance coaching literature:

- (a) While clients' AB increases over time, coaching as a change intervention in itself may have a

self-regulatory influence on clients. Each session forms more than the sum of its parts implying that it may be more important for clients 'how well' rather than 'how much more or less' they arrive at regulating emotionally. This may explain why change in AB is not found to explain the relationship between personality and Authentic Self Development (ASD);

- (b) As a consequence, clients may attain goals with minimal pressure and compulsion (i.e., they feel more self-concordant and self-determined to adjust goals) in line with their personality, which implies that self-concordance does not require any self-regulatory resources through AB in coaching.

- (c) From a humanistic perspective (Rogers, 1961), goal stability may be framed as i) a way of developing continuity and coherence across potentially contradictory behaviors in goal pursuit, ii) clients' capacity to integrate their inconsistent behaviors into a coherent self-concept, and iii) goals being malleable depending on situational factors (i.e., client feels safe with coach) or the extent to which clients' aspirations, motivations and intentions evolve. Therefore, ASD may be about maintaining clients' stability of goal-directed functioning rather than the stability of a goal per se.

Based on these implications, ASD is defined as "the process of becoming a continuously congruent self with contradictory behaviors, most probably against someone else's will in our social context. Coaching as a social context indicates a unique self-regulatory intervention that supports clients in their process of 'becoming one'".

This research yields at least two questions that coaching process researchers may investigate, as follows:

- (a) What is the role of clients' social support (Molyn et al., 2019) and more distal environment (i.e.,

sponsors of coaching) as control factors in association with self-regulation?

(b) What is the potential link between verbal as well as nonverbal synchrony and emotion and how may that link deepen our understanding of the whole body as an important 'signaling' device in emotional processing (Gelder, 2006)?

Movement synchrony as a differential interactional phenomenon

Currently, there are little resources coaching researchers can draw on to understand the role of the dynamic nature of MS in supporting clients' development and growth in coaching.

The findings of this research contribute to coaching literature, as follows:

(a) It may be essential 'how well' rather than 'how much' coach and client are synched in with each other to meet the need of the complex nature of change through coaching.

(b) Creating an authentic environment in coaching may be of greater effect than MS per se as there appear to be way too many factors (e.g., task setting, clients' positive affect, result-oriented self-reflection capacity) influencing the coaching process.

(c) MS emerging as a correctional mechanism in dyads implies that high initial MS does not necessarily imply good contact between coach and client.

(d) MS becomes less relevant over time as clients gradually grow autonomous in resolving presenting issues (i.e., they grow their self-regulatory capacities) and feel less impacted by coaches' decreased level of spontaneous responsiveness to their needs. Reciprocally, coaches grow more risk-taking in response to clients' growing more autonomous in how the latter address challenging issues. Therefore, decreasing MS may

be a sign for feeling safe. Coach and client can allow themselves to 'make mistakes' without client or coach feeling impacted by any 'ugly' situation engendered by lack of spontaneous responsiveness to mutual needs.

As a result, it is theorized that authentic nonverbal spontaneous responsiveness between coach and client implies being present to each other's needs. In coaching, Roger Noon's (2018) small qualitative study supports the notion that presence is a relational phenomenon. The notion that the body (i.e., movements) is the instrument that will indicate the extent to which we are congruent with each other any given moment, chimes in with scholarly positions (e.g., Jackson, 2017) that physicality expresses embodied presence, which is important for sharing felt experiences in coaching. Ultimately, this sharing means that embodied presence evokes change in both the coach and the client rather than the client alone as purported by Silsbee's (2008) presence-based coaching theory. Embodied presence also implies that a growing congruence between coach and client will result in a decrease of MS in dyadic trajectories across sessions.

The findings on the dynamics of MS as embodied presence support a new direction in future coaching research to study, as follows:

(a) MS as an interpersonal phenomenon in the context of WA in presence-based coaching;

(b) The predictive value of the differential downward trend of MS for coaching presence as an embodied phenomenon with reciprocal impact on coach and client;

(c) Synchrony dynamics in the first session as compared to synchrony dynamics in the final session for a specific dyadic trajectory;

(d) A set of dyadic trajectories to explore MS

dynamics in several first sessions as compared to synchrony dynamics in all final sessions of the set of dyadic trajectories under investigation;

(e) The predictive value of clients' autonomy for goal attainment through MS across varied number of sessions as it may be an additional gateway to how we can conceptualize the importance of physicality in presence-based coaching in the future;

(f) The relevance of the number of coaching sessions in association with MS as an interactional phenomenon in coaching.

(g) MS by looking into the ways in which synchrony plays out in virtual coaching settings, which was not the context of the present study.

The role of working alliance in the change process

The findings reflecting the moderator role of WS in clients' change process in this study produced the following implication for knowledge building in the future:

(a) Factors specific to WA (i.e., task setting, shared goal orientation, bonding) and other moderator variables such as AB appear to be more important than MS when it comes to clients striving to build up their capacity to self-regulate. These interaction patterns imply that clients may not feel inclined to trust coaches' efforts to sync in with them where they perceive that coaching progress is not characterized by factors specific to WA.

Therefore, there is a substantial need to further investigate WA as a moderator in coaching process research in the future. Specifically, congruence as a key interpersonal factor in the context of WA needs investigating in coaching process research. Unless clients perceive the coach as congruent in how they respond to clients' needs beyond the use of verbal language, they will not experience rapport, trust or empathy (Kolden, Klein,

Wang, & Austin, 2011), which are crucial components of WA (Bordin, 1979).

Recommendations for a coaching practice

Generally, coaches need to develop a quality of mind that can grasp the intricate context-driven interplay between self and other if we were to progress the body of knowledge in coaching as a context-sensitive area of complex human relations.

The role of clients' self-regulation

First, there is need to focus on honing coaches' capabilities to work with clients' affective states in the future. As discussed, coaching tends to be concerned with behavior-specific outcomes and mindset change as more easily measurable and discernible outcomes. This is unfortunate, as emotions were found to drive clients' capability to attain outcomes and to strengthen/weaken clients' capacity to reflect goals when "being with the coach". Hence, training coaches in working with the dynamic interplay of emotion-attitude-behavior and specifically in working with moods in the context of the coach-client relationship may enhance clients' effective growth.

Second, coaches need to

- (a) grow their coaching skills and styles to engage with clients' self-regulatory capacities towards clients' autonomy beyond goal attainment;
- (b) engage with clients' self-perception of competence starting with clients' capabilities to increase their goal competence, goal commitment and goal self-concordance towards self-congruence in various contexts;
- (c) adopt a coaching style that sustains clients' balanced affective, cognitive, behavioral and motivational aspects of personality;
- (d) encourage clients to be open for new goals

rather than stick with goals they believe they 'should' achieve.

(e) work with the whole body as an important 'signaling' device in emotional processing (Gelder, 2006) as emotions manifested in the body have implications for clients' capacity to self-regulate and ultimately develop authentically (Grant, 2012).

Grow your skills and styles to engage with clients' self-regulatory capacities towards clients' autonomy beyond goal attainment

The role of the dynamics of movement synchrony

First, there is need to train coaches in working with verbal and nonverbal interactional dynamics in coaching. Specifically, building skills how to discern dynamic patterns of interrelated speech (i.e., coaches' choice of question on starting a session; clients' choice of words on arriving to a session) and/or dynamic patterns of behavior (i.e., coaches' mood on showing up; clients' readiness for coaching) are of relevance for practitioners on their path towards mastery.

Second, there is need to (a) strengthen coaches' capacity to sense and perceive the quality of the coach-client relationship at the outset of a coaching engagement, which skills them up to use MS flexibly in supporting clients' self-regulation; (b) be and stay spontaneous and flexible by becoming aware of own needs

in the coaching relationship (i.e., be a good coach).

Third, coaching training providers ought to educate coaches around the relevance of MS as embodied presence in coaching practice and the nuanced impact that MS produces on interactional processes in coaching (Erdős, 2021) to discern clients' progress over time.

Conclusion

First, as a result of the research findings and drawing on conceptual work by Myers (2017), coaching process is defined as 'a complex dynamic change process with emergent self-organizing characteristics of the client as intrapersonal sub-processes, coach/client interactional behaviors as interpersonal sub-processes, the quality of the coaching relationship as a moderator of these sub-processes, goal attainment as the client's ultimate capacity to become autonomous beyond coaching in coaching itself as a contextual factor with self-regulatory quality in a single session or over a series of sessions'.

Second, in applying both a qualitative and quantitative methodological design, this research contributes to advancing literature on coaching process research towards a more holistic theory-building design (Myers, 2017).

Third, in providing a considerable contemporaneous sample size for data analysis, it is hoped that this research achieved generalizability of findings towards building a deeper understanding of the nature of coaching as a change process.

Fourth, in using a validated software-based approach to objectively analyzing video-taped sessions and in

combining the analytical results with client self-report data, this research accounted for the possible limitations of outcomes obtained through coach/client self-reports only.

In sum, in applying a methodologically comprehensive approach through a qualitative meta-synthesis, a large-scale international research comprising two hypothesis-testing approaches and a third explorative lens, this research provides possible avenues for better

(a) understanding why clients behave the way they do and eventually how coaching works and why it is effective;

(b) understanding how coaching produces learning for clients over the course of coaching;

(c) supporting scholars and coaches in working on the 'edge of chaos' in clients' learning to ensure we earn clients' trust in coaching to enhance our reputation in a world that is seeking ever more effective means to deal with change moments. ■

Notes

¹This research project was awarded a Harvard Grant with Institute of Coaching, McLean's Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Associate, for its innovative research design, using artificial intelligence and human interaction to measure outcomes. The project was also accredited by the International Coaching Federation (ICF).

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