

Executive coaching and self- efficacy: A study of goal-setting and leadership capacity

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The Mystery of Coaching

“For all of the work that has been done to illuminate the subject of coaching in the past 15 or 20 years, what actually happens in coaching engagements remains quite mysterious” (Kilburg, 2004).



Purpose

- Advance coaching research knowledge, and contribute to the practice of executive coaching.
- Describe and document coaches' strategies to build self-efficacy for leaders to achieve positive outcomes.
- Contribute to coach training, and the coaching literature.

Conceptual Framework

- Self-efficacy has been linked to performance through its effects on goal accomplishment (Locke & Latham, 1990).
- Leaders with higher self-efficacy will set higher goals and find better strategies to attain their goals (Seijts & Latham, 2001).
- Executive coaching is linked to increases in self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2010).



Operational Definition

- Executive coaching can be understood as a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial or supervisory authority and responsibility in an organization, and a coach who uses a range of techniques in order to help the client achieve a mutually defined set of goals with the aim of improving his or her professional performance and well-being and the effectiveness of the organization ([Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009](#)).

Self-Efficacy Definitions

Bandura (1997) describes perceived self-efficacy as belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.

Self-efficacy is a judgment about a task specific capability, and research shows that those with high self-efficacy set high goals.



Literature Review



The Research Gap



- Limited research is available in relation to executive coaching and the role of self-efficacy in goal-setting.
- In regard to the process that executive coaches use to increase self-efficacy, very little is known about the variables that influence its effectiveness.
- There has been little agreement about which executive coaching approach should be followed.

Research Question

What are the strategies that executive coaches use to build self-efficacy in relation to positive goal accomplishment in their clients?



Research Methodology

A qualitative descriptive study designed to ascertain what strategies executive coaches utilize to enhance the self-efficacy of the leader.

20 Executive Coaches

Semi-structured interview method via telephone

A pilot study confirmed the interview protocol and data collection.

Atlas.ti computer software provided project management, storage, and ease of retrieving data.

Thematic analysis was the method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.

The Sample

Executive
Coaches in the
North American
ICF Community

- ICF Certification
- or ICF Membership

Criterion:
External

- Compensation for services
- Does not work within the organization as an internal coach

Coaches Voices

- ❖ Coaches view self-efficacy as important to goal achievement.
- ❖ Coaches see high self-efficacy as beneficial to achieving significant goals in the workplace.
- ❖ Coaches note that leaders need a safe place to admit their level of efficacy. As the coach is building a relationship, understanding the client's efficacy was important.
- ❖ Coaches describe self-efficacy as confidence.
- ❖ Coaches mention those high in self-efficacy are open to feedback.



Findings

- *This research illuminates the five theory-based strategies that executive coaches use to build self-efficacy and positive goal accomplishment.*
- *The coaches clearly identified the key steps in the goal-setting coaching process.*
- *In looking at the barriers to goal setting, the coaches also described their strategies to overcome these barriers.*
- *This study confirms the importance of ICF core coaching skills.*

Findings

Key Steps in Goal-Setting Coaching Process



- Clarify the meaning and wording of the goal
- Confirm accountability and ownership
- Set action steps and milestones
- Look at future state
- Written record of commitment
- Check on the environment /organizational goals

Findings

Barriers to Goal Setting

- Behavior change
- Emotional intelligence
- Personality style
- Lack of goal clarity
- Lack of belief in self/confidence

Strategies to Overcome Barriers

- Asking questions
- Listening
- Somatic techniques
- Brainstorming
- Assigning homework
- Challenging assumptions

Strategies that build self-efficacy

As described by participants

- Gaining perspective
- Acknowledging skills and competencies
- Reviewing past success
- Social experiments
- Change models

Theory-Based Themes

- Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009)
- Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, 2008)
- Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989)
- Adult Learning (Kolb, 1984), Knowles, 1998) Mezirow, 1991)
- ICT (Boyatzis, 2006) & Immunity to Change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009)

Conclusions

- By asking executive coaches to reflect on their practices and strategies, this research has uncovered a new model that advances the understanding of the value of evidence based coaching.
- The results of this study present a range of evidence-based strategies that coaches utilize to facilitate clients self-efficacy and goal achievement.
- This study confirmed the importance of the ICF core coaching skills, and suggests the requirement of adding theory-based coaching strategies to coaching certification training.

Significance

- The results of this research *highlighted theory-based strategies* that coaches use to enhance self-efficacy and positive goal achievement.
- This study directly contributes to the coaching research literature by confirming that coaches use theory-based strategies that build self-efficacy.
- This research presents a new framework for helping leaders achieve their goals.
- This study confirmed the importance of ICF core coaching skills.

Limitations & Future Studies



- ✓ *Although purposeful, the sample was one of convenience and may not represent the total population of executive coaches.*
 - ✓ *Another limitation with the present study was the lack of measurement for goal accomplishment.*
 - ✓ *Coach perspective vs. client perspective.*
- A quantitative study with a larger sample of coaches.
 - A follow-up study to track the clients goal accomplishment.
 - Research into what conceptual model best describes coaching from the client perspective needs to be expanded.

Implications

- An increased awareness of the benefits of coaching.
- Coaches now can have a firmer understanding of how the combination of these evidence-based strategies can influence self-efficacy to accelerate positive goal accomplishment.
- Coaching can positively affect self-efficacy so that leaders can accomplish their goals to enhance organizational change.
- When coaching is provided to leaders as they acquire the skills of reflective thinking, these leaders can model that behavior for their employees. This in turn begins a new learning cycle for organizations.

Recommendations

- ✓ Adding evidence-based strategies in the ICF accreditation process would strengthen coaching, not only in executive coaching practices, it will strengthen professional development for all coaches.
- ✓ Coach training schools that provide strategies and tools consistently aligned with theory will provide the best practices in executive coaching.

Model of theory-based strategies

