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## THE GOAL-FOCUSED COACHING SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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ANTHONY M. GRANT AND MICHAEL J. CAVANAGH  
*University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia*

Goal-focused coaching is increasingly being used to help people set and reach personal and workplace goals. However, coaches' coaching skills are rarely measured. This exploratory study reports preliminary findings on the initial development and validation of a self-report measure, the Goal-focused Coaching Skills Questionnaire (GCSQ). Some participants also completed the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998) and the Insight subscale of the Self-reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS-IN), Grant, Franklin, & Langford, 2002). Convergent, face validity and test-retest reliability were found to be good, and scores on the GCSQ distinguished between professional and nonprofessional coaches. Scores on the GCSQ were also related to measures of emotional intelligence and personal insight. Behavioral observations following a coaching session indicated a significant correlation between coachees' ratings of the coaches' skills and the self-reported skill ratings of the coaches themselves. Limitations of the study are discussed and future research suggestions presented.

*Keywords:* workplace coaching, coaching skills, emotional intelligence, executive coaching, life coaching, insight.

Organizations are increasingly investing in developing the coaching skills of their managers, and coaching by line management is an important factor in enhancing employee engagement, well-being and performance (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2004; Ellinggeic, Ellinger, & Keller, 2003). Workplace coaching tends to be highly goal-focused, helping employees to set goals, develop action plans, and stay on track for success (Graham, Wedman, &

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Anthony M. Grant, PhD, and Michael J. Cavanagh, PhD, Coaching Psychology Unit, School of Psychology, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.

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Please address correspondence and reprint requests to: Dr. Anthony M. Grant, Coaching Psychology Unit, School of Psychology, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia. Phone: +61 2 9351 6792; Fax: +61 2 9351 2603; Email: [anthonyg@psych.usyd.edu.au](mailto:anthonyg@psych.usyd.edu.au)

Garvin-Kester, 1994). Reflecting the increasingly widespread use of coaching (Jarvis, 2003; Wright, 2005), one in five UK managers has received specific training in coaching skills (The Work Foundation, 2004). However, coaching skills are rarely measured or assessed using valid and reliable assessment tools (Lidbetter, 2003). The measurement of goal-focused coaching skills is an important part of assessing the impact of coach-skills training programs, and as a means of benchmarking coaching skills. Such measurement would be helpful to manager-coaches, professional coaches and human resource managers who oversee the learning and development needs of employees, as well as researchers exploring psychosocial factors related to personal and workplace coaching.

Our objective was to develop a short self-report measure which could be used quickly and with ease. Long complex questionnaires tend not to be warmly received, and we wanted the questionnaire to be both practical and reliable. This exploratory study reports our preliminary findings on the Goal-focused Coaching Skills Questionnaire (GCSQ) and presents directions for future research.

Goal-focused coaching can be understood as a collaborative, solution-focused and systematic process which is aimed at enhancing performance, self-directed learning and well-being (Grant, 2003). Although many proprietary models of coaching are presented as complex methodologies, in fact the essence of goal-focused coaching is a simple series of processes in which an individual sets a goal, develops a plan of action, begins action, monitors his or her performance (through observation and self-reflection), evaluates his or her performance (thus gaining insight) and, based on this evaluation, changes his or her actions to further enhance performance, and thus reach his or her goal (Graham et al., 1994). The role of the coach is to facilitate the coachee's progress through this cycle. In order to purposefully move through this cycle, individuals need to be able to regulate their thoughts, feelings and behaviors to best help them achieve their goals. Intelligent and purposeful use of emotions is thus central to the coaching process (David, 2005).

Emotional intelligence (EI) can be understood as having four key branches; a) the ability to accurately perceive emotions in oneself and others, b) the ability to use emotions to facilitate thought, c) understanding how different emotions arise and change over time, and d) the ability to use the knowledge from the first three branches to regulate emotions and translate them into constructive action (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Not surprisingly, EI has been shown to be an important factor in workplace performance (Abraham, 2005). Emotional intelligence in the workplace is important both on an individual level, with EI predicting individual leadership behaviors (Byrne, 2004), and on a team level with leaders' EI being associated with higher levels of group effectiveness (Stubbs, 2005).

Although the relationship between EI and goal-focused coaching skills appears self-evident, to date no research has examined this issue. In this paper

preliminary findings are reported in the initial development and validation of the Goal-focused Coaching Skills Questionnaire (GCSQ), including factor analysis, validity, and test-retest reliability and the differences between professional and nonprofessional coaches' scores are examined. In addition, the relationship between goal-focused coaching skills, EI and a measure of personal insight is examined.

It was hypothesized that EI would be positively correlated with scores on the GCSQ, that there would be a positive correlation between a measure of personal insight and scores on the GCSQ, and that professional coaches would have higher scores on the GCSQ than would nonprofessional and novice coaches.

## METHOD

Drawing on the previously outlined conceptualization of goal-focused coaching and in reference to the theoretical and empirical literature on goal attainment (e.g., Locke, 2002), helping relationships (e.g., Egan, 1974) and the change literature (e.g., Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982) five key competencies related to goal-focused coaching were identified.

Firstly, *goal setting skills*. Clearly, goals are a vital part of the coaching process. Distal and proximal goals act as standards by which individuals can evaluate their performance as they make progress towards their desired outcomes (Locke, 1996). Further, there is evidence from the self-concordance literature suggesting that goals that are aligned with individuals' personal values are associated with higher levels of goal attainment, satisfaction and well-being (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Thus a key coaching competency refers to goal-setting skills in which the coach helps the coachee set goals which are valued by the coachee and are specific and stretching, but also realistic and attainable (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006).

Two, there is a significant literature demonstrating the importance of *development of a strong working alliance* between therapists and their clients (e.g., Horvath & Symonds, 1991). The building of such alliances requires that the coach (or therapist) demonstrates appropriate levels of empathy and understanding, and creates an environment where coachees can feel free to express their own ideas (Schlegelmich & Fresco, 2005). However, it should be noted that the development of a strong working alliance requires considerable skill. Given that in the workplace many managers do not have good rapport building skills (Ambler, Roberts, & Vagneur, 1992), it is not immediately clear whether or not such skills can be fully developed in short training courses in workplace settings. The present measure may be useful in exploring this issue.

Three, a *solution-focus* to the coaching conversation is necessary, which helps the coachee to generate insights and means that the coaching process

is primarily aimed at developing solutions rather than exploring the past. Not surprisingly, coaching is typically understood as being less about advice-giving and more about client-generated solutions (Whitmore, 2004). The empirical literature suggests that solution-focused interventions can be effective in a range of populations including domestic violence (Lee, Uken, & Sebold, 2004), workplace safety behaviors (Geller, Perdue, & French, 2004), and brief coaching (Berg & Szabo, 2005).

Four, the coach's skill in *managing process and accountability* is a vital competency in ensuring the coachee completes any agreed action steps, and holding the coachee accountable for completing any agreed action steps. In order to make consistent progress, it is important that the coach be able to help the coachee monitor and evaluate his/her performance. In essence this is a core part of the self-regulation cycle (Graham et al., 1994). This requires that the coach addresses any shortfalls in performance promptly; failure to do so is a key factor in derailment whereby the coachee becomes disengaged from coaching (Kilburg, 2001).

Finally, the key purpose of coaching is to help the coachee attain outcomes that are valued and meaningful. Thus *the outcomes of coaching* is a key factor referring to goal attainment and the coachee's actually valuing the coaching process (Peterson & Miller, 2005). Questionnaire items were constructed which reflected these five competencies (see Table 1).

Convergent validity was explored by comparing the GCSQ with a measure of trait EI, and a measure of personal insight, and professional coaches' scores were compared with nonprofessional coaches' scores. In addition, behavioral observations and ratings of coaches' skills were used to investigate the validity of the scale: following a coaching session, coachees rated the coaching skills of coaches, and these ratings were compared with the coaches' own self-reported skills.

#### **PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE**

Participants were 218 individuals who were from a wide range of coaching and management-related backgrounds. These included Human Resource professionals and managers who were learning coaching skills for use in the workplace, as part of professional development programs and/or postgraduate degree programs in Human Resource Management and Coaching Psychology. This group included both novice and experienced coaches. In addition, another group of experienced professional coaches were used in the study. In total there were 68 males and 150 females, reflecting the gender composition of the coaching industry. Participants also indicated their age, gender and if they were a professional coach or not. The term "professional coach" was used to indicate whether or not participants derived all, or some, of their income from fees for the provision of coaching

services. Average age was 44 years and 5 months. Participants completed the GCSQ using a seven-point scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*, 7 = *very strongly agree*). There were no significant differences between male and female scores on the GCSQ.

One hundred and thirty-four of the 218 participants also completed the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (SEIS; Schutte et al., 1998) and the Insight subscale of the Self-reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS-IN; Grant, Franklin, & Langford, 2002).

## MEASURES

**The Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale** (Schutte et al., 1998) is a self-report measure of trait EI which is based on the model of EI proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997). Questions on this scale include items such as "By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing", and "I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice". The SEIS has been found to be a reliable and valid measure, with a reported Cronbach alpha of 0.87 and test-retest reliability of 0.78 (Schutte et al., 1998).

**The Insight Scale** (SRIS-IN; Grant et al., 2002) was used to assess the levels of participants' clarity of understanding of their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The SRIS is composed of two subscales, the Self-reflection Scale (SRIS-SR) and the Insight Scale (SRIS-IN). Items on the SRIS-IN assess the levels of individuals' clarity of understanding of their thoughts, feelings and behavior and include questions such as "I usually have a very clear idea about why I've behaved in a certain way". This scale has been found to be a reliable and valid measure, with a reported Cronbach alpha of 0.81 and test-retest reliability of 0.78 (Grant et al., 2002).

## RESULTS

### FACTOR ANALYSIS

A principal component (PC) analysis from the item pool of the 12 items comprising the GCSQ found a one-factor scale accounting for 49.78% of the variance. Coefficient alpha for the scale was .906 (see Table 1). Test-retest reliability over a two-week period was good ( $r = .70, p < 0.01$ ).

### CORRELATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

A correlational analysis was conducted using the responses of the 134 participants who completed the SEIS, the GCSQ, and the SRIS-IN (see Table 2).

TABLE 1  
PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ANALYSIS

Facet	Item	Principal Component Scores	Item-Total Correlations	Alpha if Deleted
		$\alpha = 0.906$		
O	My coaching is always effective in helping my coachees reach their goals	0.669	.591	.896
O	My coachees do not seem to value the time we spend having coaching conversations (R)	0.724	.644	.893
WA	I know how to create an environment in which coachees feel free to present their own ideas	0.764	.693	.891
WA	I purposefully use language that shows that I understand my coachee's feelings	0.659	.581	.896
SF	By the end of a coaching session my coachees always have greater clarity about the issues they face	0.754	.684	.892
G	The goals we set when coaching are always stretching but attainable	0.813	.753	.889
G	The goals we set during coaching are very important to my coachees	0.808	.744	.889
G	The goals we set during coaching are often somewhat vague (R)	0.680	.607	.895
G	I am very good at helping my coachees develop clear, simple and achievable action plans	0.756	.690	.891
SF	When coaching, I spend more time analyzing the problem rather than developing solutions (R)	0.505	.441	.904
MPA	I always ask my coachees to report to me on progress towards their goals	0.632	.575	.897
MPA	When coaching I find it difficult to address any performance shortfalls directly and promptly (R)	0.642	.577	.898

Facet Key:

O = Outcomes of Coaching; WA = Working Alliance; SF = Solution-focus; G = Goal Setting; MPA = Managing Process and Accountability (R) = Reverse scored

The authors permit free use of this scale for training and research purposes

TABLE 2  
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MEASURES

	GCSQ	SEIS	SRIS-IN	SRIS-SR
GCSQ	1	-	-	-
SEIS	.544**	1	-	-
SRIS-IN	.332**	.311**	1	-

GCSQ = Goal Focused Coaching Skills Questionnaire; SEIS = Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale; SRIS-IN = Insight Scale

\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### RESPONSES OF PROFESSIONAL AND NONPROFESSIONAL COACHES

In order to see if the GCSQ differentiated between professional and nonprofessional coaches, the responses from these two groups were compared using an independent sample  $t$  test. A total of 213 participants indicated that they were either professional or nonprofessional coaches. There were 84 professional coaches and 129 nonprofessional coaches. Five participants did not respond to this question. There was a significant difference ( $t_{(211)} = 10.87, p < .001$ ) between the mean scores of the professional group ( $M = 67.66, SD = 6.62$ ) compared with the nonprofessional group ( $M = 56.89, SD = 7.34$ ).

### BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATIONS

To further investigate the validity of the GCSQ, 38 coaches conducted a 45-minute coaching session with a coachee using a standardized and structured goal-focused coaching methodology. On finishing this session, the coach completed the GCSQ and rated his/her own level of competence during the coaching session. In a blind process, the coachees completed a mirror version of the GCSQ, rating their perception of the coach's competence on the GCSQ. There was a significant correlation between the coach's and the coachee's ratings ( $r = .577; p < 0.001$ ).

### DISCUSSION

This exploratory study produced a scale with good internal consistency and indications of convergent and face validity and test-retest reliability. The significant correlational relationships between the GCSQ, the SEIS and the SRIS-IN indicate that the GCSQ possesses good convergent validity.

It could be expected that individuals who had good coaching skills would also have higher levels of EI. Indeed, therapists have been found to have higher levels of EI than their clients (Schutte et al., 1998) and individuals with good goal-setting skills also have higher levels of EI (Martinez-Pons, 1997). The positive

correlational relationship between the SRIS-IN and the GCSQ also lends support for the convergent validity of the GCSQ, as insight is central to the coaching (Grant, 2003) and goal attainment processes (Locke, 2002).

The significant differences between professional coaches' and nonprofessional coaches' scores on the GCSQ is an important finding and good initial evidence for the scale's ability to distinguish between theoretically different groups. This finding suggests that the GCSQ may have practical discriminatory characteristics. This study also revealed that self-reported EI and personal insight are related to goal-focused coaching skills. This is the first study to investigate these issues and to provide preliminary evidence that goal-focused coaching skills and EI are related.

In addition, the face validity and the real-world applicability of the GCSQ are supported by the fact that in a blind rating process, coachees' ratings of the coaches' actual coaching skills were significantly correlated with the coaches' own self-reported ratings of their own skills. This finding lends additional weight to the validity of the GCSQ. In short, the scale appears to have good validity and appears to map real-world coaching experience. Thus overall this study presents useful preliminary evidence that the GCSQ is a valid and useful self-report measure of goal-focused coaching skills.

As regards limitations, the present study was cross-sectional, and scores on the GCSQ were not investigated in relation to actual outcomes of coaching, such as coachee's levels of goal attainment following a series of coaching sessions. Further, it should be borne in mind that in this study a self-report EI scale was used, rather than an objective ability measure. The concept of EI has been somewhat controversial (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998). A key debate has been about the differences between ability EI and trait EI, and the roles of objective ability measures versus self-report trait measures (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Objective measures assess individuals' actual performance on specific tasks and assess cognitive-emotional abilities, whereas trait measures use self-report questionnaires to assess emotion-related behavioral dispositions and self-perceived abilities. Although self-report measures of EI have been criticized as being closely related to established personality measures and for not thoroughly assessing the full EI construct, in terms of measurement most success has been achieved in relation to trait EI rather than ability EI (Perez, Petrides, & Furnham, 2005).

Future researchers should use longitudinal methodologies to examine the relationship between the coaches' self-reported coaching skills on the GCSQ and coachees' actual goal attainment following coaching sessions. In addition, it would be useful to examine whether or not the GCSQ is responsive to change in coaches' levels of goal-focused coaching skills, such as may occur following a







training program designed to enhance coaching skills. Future researchers should also seek to develop norms for the GCSQ in a range of populations.

In conclusion, this exploratory study indicates that the GCSQ shows promise as a self-report measure of goal-focused coaching skills. As coaching is increasingly being used in organizations, the GCSQ may prove to be a useful tool in the assessment and measurement of coaching skills in the workplace, and in measuring the impact of coaching skills training programs.



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