

The nature of the internal coaching relationship

Simon Machin, BELRON, Milton Park, Stroud Road, Egham, Surrey, TW20 9EL
Email contact: simonM@belron.com

Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study into the nature of the relationship between in-house coaches and their clients based on three case studies of coach-client pairs using a phenomenological approach. Findings suggest that trust is of paramount importance and this enables both a level of psychological depth and challenge by the coach. Trust is created by both the person of the coach (specifically the level of empathy, listening, a non-judgemental attitude and congruence) and the person of the client (and specifically client readiness for change). These findings are discussed alongside research from the counselling field. Many similarities emerge. However, coaches and clients are found to share views on their relationship in contrast to counsellors and their clients.

Keywords : coaching, counselling, relationship, trust, psychological depth, person of the coach, person of the client

Introduction

There appears to be virtually universal agreement on the importance of the relationship within coaching: pick up almost any coaching book and it will suggest the value of the relationship. And yet there are few research studies within the coaching field exploring this relationship in any depth. O'Broin and Palmer (2006, p.16) highlight "*one area continuing to lack studies is that of the coach-client relationship*". They further highlight the importance of research into perceptions of both client and coach and how coaches can improve the coach-client relationship. This paper explores the nature of the coaching relationship between in-house coaches and their clients.

Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) have conducted qualitative research into the client experience and perception of coaching, as part of research into the impact of coaching on stress management. Four themes emerged from their research as important, including the coaching relationship: they found trust and transparency as important drivers of creating this relationship. As their starting point was to establish a broad understanding of the client experience, the emphasis was less on exploring the nature of the coaching relationship, and they call for further research to examine this. Kemp (2008) explores the role of the person of the coach within coaching relationships, stressing the need for coach self-management.

Stober et al (2006) suggest that the individual coach is a critical factor related to the outcome of coaching, and argue it is important to understand what coaches do in this context. Scoular and Linley (2006) argue that matching factors between coach and client may play an important role in the relationship. There are also calls to focus on strong coaching relationships and the need for coaches to develop skills of interpersonal effectiveness, listening and empathy (Peterson, 1996; Stern, 2004; Wasylyshyn, 2003). Bluckert (2005) further argues for a greater emphasis on the coaching relationship within coach education, making the link to client-centred therapy and Rogerian thinking.

De Haan (2008) is a notable exception in that he places a strong emphasis on the coaching relationship and that he draws on research into the counselling relationship. If the research on the counselling relationship is relevant then much is available for the coaching field to draw on: the research is extensive. Bachkirova (2005) highlights some of the differences and similarities between the two disciplines of counselling and coaching, highlighting the similarity in terms of the importance of the relationship, the importance of the client's commitment and the role of practitioners themselves within the helping process. Differences are also highlighted in areas of ultimate purpose, context, client expectations, possible outcome, theoretical foundation, professional skills and initial motivation. Brickey (2002) puts this last point succinctly: *"psychotherapy assumes that something is broken and needs to be fixed ... coaching assumes a person is doing well and wants to do even better"*.

Kets de Vries (2005) also highlights differences: coaching takes place under the assumption of an absence of pathology; is largely work-related and is more generally orientated towards concrete results and specific actions. Coaches and therapists also have different training and work experiences; plus practical differences exist such as location, duration and frequency.

De Haan (2008) recognises that the differences between psychotherapy and coaching are so difficult to quantify and also that so little quantitative research has been done within coaching that conclusive evidence is not currently available on the transportability of the research findings from counselling to coaching. Clarkson (1996) describes the proliferation of different psychotherapeutic disciplines: 450 different schools as of 1984. It is possible there are more differences between different schools of psychotherapy than between coaching and "counselling". De Haan (2008) goes on to suggest that the differences between coaching and counselling are in emphasis only, and in practice are relatively small, especially when stacked against the spectrum of different approaches to psychotherapy. He suggests that the similarities in dominant approaches and ways of working are such that provisionally the principal results of research from psychotherapy can, at least tentatively, be applied to coaching.

Against this backdrop this paper explores the nature of the internal coaching relationship. Are the perspectives of the in-house coach and client on the coaching relationship different? If so what characterises these differences and what influences this relationship in either a positive or negative direction? The findings are discussed alongside the research from the counselling field where similarities and differences are highlighted.

Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore the nature of the coaching relationship from the perspective of both the coach and client, taking the standpoint that only the coach and client could truly describe their relationship (rather than some "objective observer"). The intention was to understand the essence of their experience of this relationship, and the meaning of this, exploring their thoughts, feelings and beliefs. This lent itself to a phenomenological approach working with different coach-client pairs, and with a narrative form focused on a description of the essence of their experience (Creswell, 2007).

The research was specifically targeted at understanding the relationship between internal coaches and their clients. However "internal coach" is potentially a broad definition, and further criteria were applied in selecting coaches for the sample. Only internal coaches for whom coaching was a defined part of their role (as opposed to "line manager as coach") were considered. Further all coaches selected for the sample were accredited at a minimum of post-graduate certificate level

and undertaking external supervision. All coaches and clients in the study were drawn from the same organisation – an international service business.

After applying these criteria three internal coaches were approached to be involved in the study. Clients of these coaches were then selected to ensure that interviews could be conducted during the “working phase” of coaching. Coaches were therefore involved in identifying potential clients for the sample (the aim was to select one client per coach). The ‘working phase’ criteria meant only researching pairs who were part-way through their coaching programme, avoiding both a start-up stage (where views of the relationship may be unformed and where views might be of an expectation of the experience rather than of the experience itself) and any closure effect (which might put an unrealistically positive perspective on the relationship). This also ensured that the coaching relationship had fully formed and that this relationship was their main relationship such that any pre-existing relationship did not dominate. Further, findings from this “working phase” may be the most valuable to a practicing coach. In practice these criteria meant the potential sample of clients was very small, and the final decision used in selecting one client per coach was simply based on ease of access (i.e. UK based where possible) – hence in practice coaches had little involvement in the selection decision of which clients to include in the study, beyond identifying which coaching programmes were in the “working phase”. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used independently with both parties in the pair prior to the final couple of coaching sessions in their programme.

All coaches were UK based (two females, one male): two clients were UK based and one based on continental Europe (again two females and one male): to ensure the anonymity of participants in this paper all quotations are given in a female form. The clients were all employed in different parts of the organisation (in separate business units) – all held managerial positions ranging from middle manager to executive level. In all cases face-to-face interviews were used, each lasting about one hour, and the interviews took place at the same point in the coaching process for each pair (i.e. if the coach was interviewed between sessions six and seven in the coaching programme then the client was also interviewed between these sessions).

Smith and Osbourn’s (2003 and 2004) approach to conducting interpretative phenomenological analysis was then adopted. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in their entirety. The transcriptions were not read until all interviews were completed to ensure reflection on one interview did not affect the next. An ideographic approach was used to analyse the interview data. Each transcript was analysed in turn and initially independently of each other. Each transcript was read several times and notes made of interesting points before identifying possible themes. Only at this stage was a higher level of abstraction introduced (Smith and Osbourn, 2003). Emerging themes were grouped into clusters. This led to a table of super-ordinate themes. Prevalence of comments within the data was not the only factor used in selecting themes: the ability to explain other aspects of the interviews was also key (Smith, Jaraman and Osbourn, 1999). This process was repeated for each transcript.

Findings

The special nature of the coaching relationship

Both coaches and their clients in the study described their coaching relationship as different to other relationships in their lives. For example one client contrasted with other relationships “*well it’s always hard to tell isn’t it, you never know if someone is there for you or not. In a coaching relationship that’s what it’s for. I think it’s almost more safe in a coaching relationship*” (client 3). One coach commented “*I think it was one step further than you would normally have in a work*

relationship. But even in a friendship I would think it was sort of deeper, in deeper than you would do with even a friendship” (coach 3). “Safety” and “informality” were described as important characteristics within the relationship.

For clients the “time and space” afforded within the relationship was especially important as recognised by client 3:

I've said I'm going to do this coaching, I'm going to get something out of it. I've got these couple of hours now to really sit there and focus on it rather than pushing it always to the back and I think that's the most important thing about it really - just giving you time to think. That's the most helpful, time and space to breathe and think about how it is (client 3).

This was also recognised by coaches: *“I don't think it's just about two hours, there's the space, I think just the whole relationship has given her that space”* (coach 1).

Trust

Another relationship condition that emerged strongly was the need for trust in the relationship. Every coach and every client in the study stressed the importance of trust in their relationship. For example, one client stated: *“I trust her and that's very important and I feel I can say whatever to her without holding anything back”* (client 1). From another: *“That trust built through the sessions that we did. So it was trust that she [the coach] had built through the relationship”* (client 2).

From another (also illustrating the special nature of the coaching relationship):

She now knows things about me in terms of my personal life that very few people know. So in that there's got to be a huge amount of trust just implicated from that. I mean the huge condition on that is that trust in the relationship. This relationship, this coaching relationship, for it to work I needed to be able to share things that I would probably be uncomfortable sharing with anybody. My partner probably excluded from that, but anyone else. So therefore the trust has to be there, to be completely comfortable with that trust (client 3).

Psychological Depth

One of the reasons trust was seen as so important by the participants was that it enabled “psychological depth”. Two of the clients expressed significant surprise at the level of psychological depth entered into via the coaching. For example, *“I guess I'm surprised how much personally we touched on and how much we went through on that personal level. I was expecting it to be a lot more, not superficial, but more from a business point of view”* (client 2).

Also both of these clients drew parallels to counselling: *“when I mention the coaching and the sort of counsellor sort of relationship, I see them quite similar just from my experience”* (client 2); *“I wasn't lying on the couch or anything. But it almost felt a bit psychological – like psychotherapy”* (client 3). They talked about an expectation that the coaching would be business-focused rather than getting “beneath the surface”: *“we went down to that in a lot more detail than I would have expected. There were brilliant parallels coming out of it, but I never expected that. I was expecting it to be kept on ‘these are the strategies you need to put in place’, that sort of stuff. Not actually try and understand why I'm doing it”* (client 2).

However, this depth was seen by these clients (and indeed by their coaches too) as an absolutely vital part of the coaching – so surprising and yet highly valued. In all the cases this psychological depth was described as vital to the success of the coaching: *“I know if we hadn’t of then gone on and looked deeper, that wouldn’t have been useful”* (client 3).

Challenge and “holding to account”

Yet another reason why trust was seen as so critical within the coaching relationship was that it enabled a level of challenge by the coach. This was seen as important by both coaches and their clients, and clients appreciated the level of challenge from their coaches. For example, *“I could provide some challenge to her in areas that she wasn’t necessarily expecting. I’m not going to paint a picture of it being nice and rosy and a nice chat, it definitely wasn’t, there has been a lot of challenge in there”* (coach 2).

In one case the coach worried about a potential lack of challenge: *“part of me thinks has it been challenging enough, has there been the kind of slight friction there that may have helped to move things further, has it been a little bit too comfortable, has it been a bit too nice”* (coach 2). Indeed when the level of challenge was perceived as lower by a client, this was missed: *“I think there could have been more there, I could have had a little more challenge coming in. A little more stretch in terms of me personally. But it’s not that it wasn’t there, it’s just I feel that there could have been a bit more”* (client 2).

The coach “holding the client to account” – doing what they say they will do - also emerged as important within the coaching relationship. This was appreciated when it was present: *“she’s just expecting me to live up to what I say myself...“you’re living out what you promised again”* (client 1). It was also missed when it was not present: *“what I was kind of expecting was ‘this last session we agreed these actions, what have you done about them, what’s the outcome of them?’, that type of stuff”* (client 2).

The person of the coach

Trust within the relationship was seen as developing, in part, from the behaviours of the coach themselves: *“I think the sense of trust actually comes as a result of the other behaviours”* (coach 2). Both clients and coaches saw the person of the coach themselves as an important part of the relationship and specifically to establishing trust. The clients readily identified the factors in the coach that they especially valued - the coaches also had a clear view on what they personally did that helped within the relationship, and identified similar factors to their client.

Empathy and listening were consistently described by both coaches and their clients as absolutely critical within the coaching relationship. Clients used words such as “warmth”, “care”, “emotional engagement”, and “focused on me”. For example, one client described of their coach, *“I mean the thing that comes to my mind straightaway is her natural warmth. I think she is a very warm person, she is a very personable person she was very empathetic, but then also cautious because it was personal”* (client 2).

Coaches also described the importance of empathy: *“it’s about being emotionally engaged as well I think and that was definitely there ... and sometimes some of the things that she was saying, well, actually I just wanted to get up and go and hug her”* (coach 2). Listening also emerged numerous times as important often alongside empathy.

An accepting and non-judgemental attitude on the part of the coach was also strongly mentioned by both clients and their coaches as important. For example, from clients: *“I don’t feel I have something I need to live up to other than myself”* (client 1) and *“she doesn’t seem biased in any way... not sort of rushing off into any opinions”* (client 3). All coaches within the study also, like their clients, described the importance of a non-judgemental attitude: *“You’re not actually making any judgement but you’re just opening it up for them to be more open with you”* (coach 3); *“I think probably because of what I said before about the non-judgementalness, I never suppose that she should know anything. I never have an expectation, I’ve never had any expectations of what she knows or how she behaves, it just is what it is and that’s what we’re working with”* (coach 2).

Coach congruence also emerged as important within the cases (with words such as “realness”, “honesty”, “openness”). One coach put this as *“you’re saying one thing and the other person is kind of reacting in a certain way to suit the relationship, and so you need to kind of break that to become real. Being real as a coach I suppose is about relying on your instincts. I suppose it’s about sharing the things that are going on for me as well”* (coach 2).

Clients also highlighted the importance of the initial fit with the coach, built on these factors, and the impact of this on the subsequent relationship *“I would have known after the first session that this wouldn’t be valuable”* (client 1).

The person of the client

The person of the client was not an area specifically designed into the interview framework. However, in spite of this, in every interview, client factors emerged as a significant factor in the internal coaching relationship. Both coaches and their clients especially highlighted the importance of client readiness as contributors to trust in the relationship. Some of the factors that characterised readiness from the interviews included openness, a drive to change, a positive outlook on the coaching, inviting challenge, receiving challenge positively, a lack of defensiveness and a willingness on the part of the client to go to uncomfortable places. Coaches and clients described these as important influences on their relationship.

For example one coach described *“she’s been a very willing participant and she’s easily sort of opened herself up. Well I say ‘easily’, readily... I think she made her mind up that if she was going to do this she probably needed to do it a hundred percent. So she’s sort of helped strip herself bare”* (coach 1).

Coaching framework and process

During the course of the interviews both coaches and clients would return to the topic of the actual framework of coaching, stressing that the relationship could not be totally divorced from the goals and structure of coaching: *“It’s the personal touch, but then there needs to be a framework there as well, that’s partly through those tasks that you agreed early on, but that framework for the coaching is almost like another critical ingredient”* (client 2). Further when there was clear agreement on the goals of coaching this was discussed very positively by both coaches and clients. In one case though there was a perceived lack of agreement on these goals and this was raised as an issue.

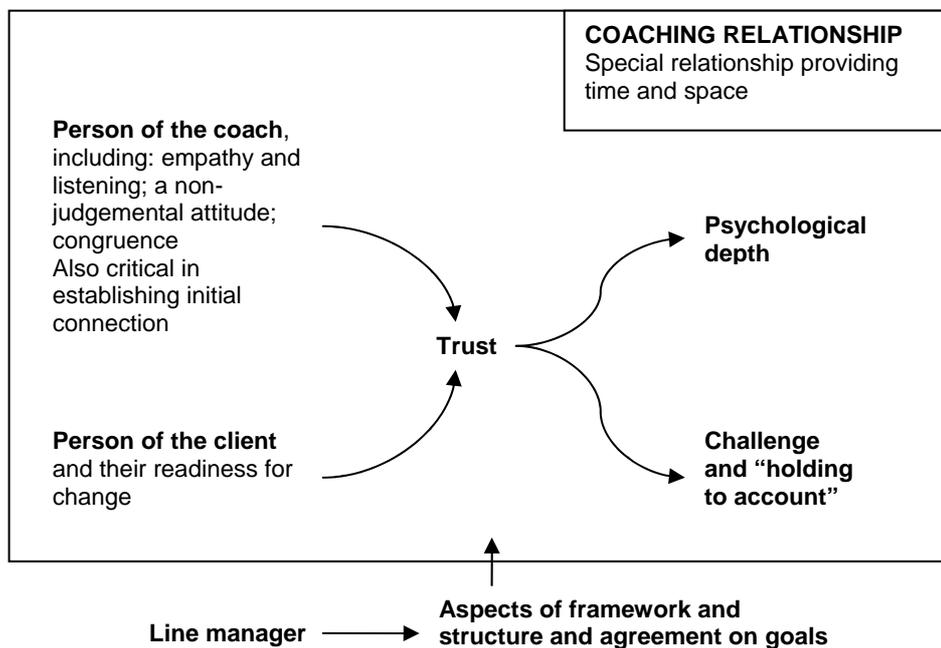
Coaches and clients were also keen to broaden the discussion to include the line manager, and to talk about their role in the relationship. There was substantial agreement about the importance of involving the line manager and how their involvement was missed when not present

(for example, in discussing the line manager's involvement "it's something that's important and we should have had it, so he could have come in sooner to the relationship, we could have set that up, so I could have brought my line manager in a lot quicker" (client 2). The participants were essentially raising the point that the coaching relationship is not only a two-way relationship, but also, at least at times, a three-way relationship.

Discussion

Figure 1 summarises the key themes emerging from the study.

Figure 1: Emerging picture of the coaching relationship



The coaching relationship was seen to provide a special relationship to clients. Within this trust was recognised to be of paramount importance with all coaches and clients in the study highlighting the importance of trust for the coaching relationship to work. This suggests that Gyllensten and Palmer's (2007) study, that found trust vital in coaching for stress management, may also apply to other forms of coaching. A key part of internal coaches' roles with their clients in this study seems to be to build – and then maintain - a trusting relationship. The study was concerned with the "internal coach-client" relationship. It may be that since the coach is internal to the organisation this raises the importance of trust over and above the level required even for an external coach: with an external coach the client can assume a level of organisational detachment, whereas with an internal coach both coach and client are likely to continue working in the same organisation long after the coaching programme has completed.

The value of psychological depth, enabled by trust, was another very strong feature of the interviews. The study certainly suggests a need for an ability in internal coaches to work with a level of psychological depth with their clients and a willingness to "get beneath the surface". This reflects Lee's view (2003) of one of the core competencies of coaches being psychological-mindedness. Lee reflects:

Psychological-mindedness refers to a curiosity and willingness to engage with possible answers to the question why?, and to test these hypotheses through questioning and ongoing observation. In coaching, psychological-mindedness is an essential competence, since it is through constructions about underlying motives that the coach understands what factors will influence the potential for successful change (2003, p.143-144).

This has significant implications for the development of internal coaches – to ensure they have the appropriate skill set to achieve psychological depth with clients rather than simply a focus on the business perspective. Clients clearly valued this ability in their coaches, but it is interesting to reflect that two of the clients expressed significant surprise at this depth. This raises the question of whether internal coaches should prepare their clients for this depth in discussing the coaching programme in advance. There was nothing to suggest that the clients had suffered as a consequence of their surprise, but it is certainly possible that this lack of awareness of what is required of clients may be detrimental in some other situations. It may be worthwhile for the coach to explain this feature of the relationship from the outset in order to prepare the client.

Both coaches and clients suggested that trust was created both by the person of the coach and the person of the client. The counselling literature also highlights the importance of the person of the counsellor in therapy. This literature shows different levels of counsellor effectiveness irrespective of the treatment approach they adopt (Assay and Lambert, 2001; Lubronsky et al, 1997; Norcross and Goldfield, 1992) and suggests that the properties of the client, therapist and their relationship are important drivers of the outcome, as opposed to the specific techniques. Lambert and Barley (2001, P.1) summarise:

common factors such as empathy, warmth and the therapeutic relationship have been shown to correlate more highly with client outcome than specialized treatment intervention ... decades of research indicate that the provision of therapy is an interpersonal process in which a main curative component is the nature of the therapeutic relationship.

The research on the factors of the counsellor within the relationship is largely from a humanistic perspective (Watson and Geller, 2005). This research has demonstrated the link between the factors proposed by Rogers (1957, 1960) on either the “working alliance” or directly on outcome. Therapists perceived by their clients as empathetic, accepting, non-judgemental and congruent are more likely to facilitate agreement about goals and tasks (Asay and Lambert, 2001; Bohart et al, 2002; Orlinsky et al, 1994; Stiles et al, 1998; Watson and Greenberg, 1994).

This study also suggests the importance of the person of the coach in the internal coaching relationship. As in counselling the factors proposed by Rogers have emerged as very important in these cases.

Further in counselling it is recognised that the client themselves are an important contribution to the therapy relationship and ultimately to outcome. In fact it is the client perspective on counselling that is most significant in predicting outcome – the client perspective is a better predictor than the counsellor perspective – and again there is extensive evidence within the research material (Al-Darmaki and Kivlighan, 1993; Connors et al, 1997; Goering et al, 1997; Henkleman and Paulson, 2006; Hubble et al, 1999; Kivlighan and Shaughnessy, 2000; Lambert and Ogles, 2004; Luborsky, 1994). Jinks (1999) and Rennie (1994) demonstrated that there was more happening with clients than was apparent to either counsellor or detached observer.

The fact that client factors emerged so readily in this study suggests a similar importance in these coaching relationships, and any further study of the coaching relationship is advised to explicitly consider the characteristics of the client alongside that of the coach.

Also, in raising the issue of the structure of the coaching, and the importance of agreement on goals the participants in this study are reflecting some of Bordin's (1979) view about the counselling relationship and his definition of the "working alliance". He defined the working alliance as a collaboration between client and counsellor based on the development of an attachment bond as well as a shared commitment to the goals and tasks of counselling. He theorized that this working alliance is the key to change in the client and its development is dependent on the level of collaboration in the relationship. Goals are the targets for interventions and the key is the level of agreement regarding these goals. Tasks are the behaviours and cognitions engaged in by both the counsellor and client whilst in counselling - the relevance of the tasks to the goals must be evident. Bonds are concerned with the level of partner compatibility – expressed as liking, trusting or a feeling of common purpose and understanding between counsellor and client. The research studies on the working alliance in counselling are extensive and have found it to be a robust predictor of outcome across diverse perspectives (Halstead et al, 1990; Krupnick et al, 1996; Lubronsky et al, 1997; Martin et al, 2000; Pinsoff 1992; Watson and Geller, 2005). In particular Horvath and Symonds (1991), in their meta-analysis of 24 studies, confirmed the working alliance as a powerful predictor of psychotherapy outcomes. The research also reveals that the higher the level of congruence between the client viewpoint and the counsellor viewpoint the greater the impact on positive outcome (Cummings et al, 1992a; Kivlighan and Arthur, 2000; Fitzpatrick et al, 2005; Reis and Brown, 1999; Tryon et al, 2007).

So far, the study has demonstrated consistency with De Haan's view (2008) that some of the differences between counselling and coaching are more a matter of emphasis. But there was one area where the findings diverged from the counselling research. The similarity in the accounts of their relationship of coach and client within a coaching pair was striking. It was very evident, both on first reading and as each pair of transcripts was analysed in detail, that each account was describing the same relationship, with coach and client valuing similar factors.

The counselling research suggests that clients and therapists perceive the same process and relationship differently, and there is much written about this within the research literature (Bachelor and Salame, 2000; Cecero et al, 2001; Fitzpatrick et al, 2005; Gaddis, 2004; Gershefski et al, 1996; Hatcher et al, 1995; Henkelman and Paulson, 2006; Heppner et al, 1999; Hilsenroth et al, 2004; Lever and Gmeiner, 2000; Maione and Chernail, 1999; Mallinckrodt and Nelson, 1991; Ogrodniczuk et al, 2000). These studies help demonstrate that clients and counsellors value different things. Clients tend to value the relationship more and generally rate the outcomes and process of therapy higher than do counsellors, who generally focus more on cognitive insight (Halstead et al 1990; Llewelyn, 1988; Nelson and Neufeldt, 1996). Bedi et al (2005) and Lilliengren and Werbart (2005) show that clients and therapists do not always agree on what makes for a good working relationship. Counsellors and clients often disagree on session impact (Caskey et al, 1984; Dill-Standiford et al, 1988) and there is low agreement when identifying important events within counselling (Cummings et al 1992 a, b).

But this level of difference has simply not been apparent in this study of the internal coaching relationship. It is perhaps easy to shrug this off as merely three cases, within just one specific organisation. Equally it is possible to argue that the qualitative basis of this research and the generally quantitative basis of the counselling research means that we are comparing "apples and pears". It may be that whilst both coaches and clients talk about empathy, for example, as

important from a qualitative standpoint, if they were asked to actually rate or rank the importance of empathy from a quantitative standpoint, differences of emphasis would emerge.

But a third possible explanation is interesting to consider. Maybe coaches and clients often do have a similar view on their relationship. The participants in this study described their relationship as a special one, and a positive one. It is not so surprising that in special, positive relationships both parties should share views on that relationship. It is possible that this is an area where the difference between counselling and coaching becomes apparent. It is perhaps more likely that coaches and clients approach their relationship on more of an equal footing, compared to counsellors and clients, where there is more of an assumption of problems that have to be fixed. Also, there is perhaps an increased likelihood that, within coaching, a client has a shared responsibility for the process. And maybe these aspects mean that the coach and client are more likely to agree on the relationship than in counselling. If this is true then it suggests that there is likely to be significant overlap in the views of both parties in a positive coaching relationship.

This finding has implications for coaches. For example, it encourages them to trust their own instinct. If their view of the relationship has a likelihood of being similar to that of their client then this encourages personal reflection on the relationship. This personal reflection (what is working in the relationship, what is lacking, what needs further explicit discussion and agreement) may have a good chance of also being true in the client's eyes. This is not to say that checking with the client is not critically important, but rather that a coach's reflections might valuably include the thought experiment along the lines "what if my view of the coaching relationship is also shared by my client – what would I do?"

Research limitations and further questions

This research was conducted from a phenomenological perspective – it works with the words the participants chose to describe their coaching relationship. As such this study perhaps tells us more about how the participants talk about the relationship than necessarily about the relationship itself. It could also be argued that phenomenological analysis is constrained by the ability of the participants to describe their experience – perhaps a difficult task for a slippery concept such as the coaching relationship, arguably especially for clients coming to a coaching relationship for the first time (from this perspective it is reassuring that both coaches and clients have produced similar accounts). But, as with all phenomenological analysis it is constrained by the ability of people to use language to describe the experience.

Perhaps the most apparent limitation of this research is that it is limited to a small number of participants, and that they were all relationships based within the same organisation. This is a commercial organisation and all of the coaching relationships can be described as 'executive coaching'. Further pair-based research that widened the number of relationships could be useful and provide further insight into the ability to generalise from these to other internal coaching relationships in other organisations, or indeed to external coaching relationships.

As mentioned above it may be that whilst similar factors about the relationship have emerged from both parties, if they were asked to actually rate or rank the importance of each factor from a quantitative standpoint, differences of emphasis may emerge. Research that further explored the perceived importance of the factors raised in this study by both coaches and clients, perhaps from a quantitative basis may also provide a richer understanding of their view on the coaching relationship.

This research has also examined the coaching relationship at a single point in time, and hence has less to offer in terms of the dynamics of the relationship. Further research that explored explicitly the changes in the relationship throughout coaching would be valuable. Finally research that looked to understand how the coaching relationship, including the early relationship, specifically impacts on the final outcome and success of coaching could be of particular value.

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Simon Machin works for BELRON where he has helped design, develop and implement their approach to executive development. His current focus is on developing coaching as a part of this approach. This research formed part of Simon's MA in Coaching and Mentoring Practice at Oxford Brookes University, which was awarded the prize by APECS for the best research dissertation relevant to executive coaching