



The International Journal of
Coaching in Organizations™

IJCO

*Executive Coaching and the Effect
on Causal Attribution
(Peer Review Article)*

Frode Moen

This article first appeared in the *IJCO International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*™, 2011 Issue 30, 8(2), 90-105. It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.™ (PCPI). Email John Lazar at john@ijco.info for such permission.

Journal information:
www.ijco.info

Purchases:
www.pcpionline.com

ISSUE 30,8(2)

ISSN 1553-3735

© Copyright 2011 PCPI.
All rights reserved worldwide.



Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.™

PEER REVIEW

Executive Coaching and the Effect on Causal Attribution

Frode Moen

This article investigates the impact of a one year executive coaching experiment on intrapersonal causal attribution. The results showed that executive coaching had significant effects on the executives' causal attributions. Causal attributions of successful achievements to strategy, ability and effort increased, whereas causal attributions of unsuccessful achievement to ability decreased as a result from the experiment. The findings are discussed from the perspective of the principles characterizing coaching, such as the coachee's controllability and responsibility in the process and the positive asset search focusing on strengths and positive assets.

In business, executive performance is typically measured by tangible, observable outcomes based on expectations and previous accomplishments. Companies frequently focus on the growth and development of requisite skills of their employees aimed at maximizing individual performance and corporate financial return. An average workday for executives in a competitive market is often hectic and they are expected to (and expect to) constantly upgrade their technical and leadership skills (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2008). Thus, high effort and good results are expected. Experiences among business executives should therefore lead to a complex mixture of thoughts and feelings related to their performances. How people react to success and failures depends on their interpretation of their outcomes. *Attribution theory* seeks to explain people's causal interpretations of successes and failures as well as the emotional and behavioural consequences of these interpretations. Beliefs about causality determine cognitive, affective, and behavioural consequences (Weiner, 1995).

Executive coaching is a fairly new discipline related to growth and development, and the interest for executive coaching has escalated during the last decade (Grant, 2006; Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999). Two major responsibilities for a coach are to elicit coachee generated solutions and strategies, and hold the coachee responsible and accountable in the learning process. Thus, one effect from executive coaching should be an increased tendency to attribute achievement outcomes to internal and controllable factors, such as effort and strategy.

In the present study, nineteen CEOs from a business sector leading high-tech Fortune 500 Company participated voluntarily in an experiment over a period of one year. The main purpose was to explore the effects from executive coaching on intrapersonal causal attributions.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Coaching

Theorists tend to describe coaching as a new route to growth and development, which means that at least some people agree that coaching is different from counseling, consultation, teaching, mentoring and other helping relationship roles (Downey, 1999; Whitmore, 2002; Flaherty, 1999). In general, the field can be divided into two different schools of thought: those who claim that coaching is everything an executive consultant or coach does to realize the coachee's potential (Kinlaw, 1989; Schein, 2006; Hargrove, 2003), and those who claim that coaching is a specific method to realize that potential (Downey, 1999; Whitmore, 2002; Flaherty, 1999). The first group places less emphasis on the importance of active participation and responsibility by the coachee, and claims that coaching is everything that is done which results in growth and development. The second group argues that coaching refers to a particular method which focuses on empowerment of the coachee through active participation and responsibility in the coaching process. This group looks upon coaching as a kind of consulting process.

Both groups agree that the overall goal of coaching is to achieve growth and development. Today, companies spend millions of dollars annually developing teams and individuals in order to drive growth and deliver appropriate results. The marketplace is still growing; in 2006, spending levels were estimated at \$2 billion per annum globally (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006). Successful organizations in today's emerging knowledge economy have to innovate continually to maintain their place in the dynamic marketplace. Executives are expected to (and expect to) constantly upgrade their technical and leadership skills (*ibid.*). In this very practical sense, the growth and development of executives and employees should be an important factor for organizational success. Self-actualization is the process of being true to oneself and fully committed to developing one's competence defined as "the total knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes enabling [one] to perform particular tasks and functions according to defined goals"¹ (Lai, 2004, p.48). Based on this, the following definition is offered in this study: *Coaching is a method which aims to achieve self-actualization by facilitating learning and developmental processes to promote the resource base of another person. The method is characterized by its active involvement of the coachee through powerful questioning and active listening.*

¹Translated from Norwegian by the author.

In business, coaching is usually delivered by two different types of people (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999): those who are internal to the organization and those who are external consultants. This review will focus on external coaching of executives in business. Executive coaching is recognized as a way for organizations and individuals to improve executives' performance (Morgan, Harkins, & Marshall, 2005).

The conversation between the coach and the coachee is therefore the heart of the coaching process (Hargrove, 2003; Moen, 2009). The coach's most important task in the process is to facilitate reflections based upon a focused case brought in by the coachee. This involves reflections related to the coachees' goal setting and possible strategies for goal attainment and their efficiency (Moen, 2009). One major responsibility for a coach described by the ICF² is therefore to discover, clarify, and align with what the coachee wants to achieve. Further, the coach's responsibility is to elicit coachee generated solutions and strategies through encouraging to coachee self-discovery, and holds the coachee responsible and accountable in the learning process (ICF, 2010; Moen & Kvalsund, 2008). Thus, building awareness and responsibility through empowering the coachee are two key principles in coaching (Whitmore, 2002; Gallwey, 1997; Moen, 2009).

Causal attribution

Influenced by the theoretical analyses done by Rotter (1966), and more importantly, Heider (1958) and Kelley (1967), Weiner developed his attribution theory (1972) focusing on intrapersonal processes. Weiner addressed the fact that one has to use and combine various sources of information to determine causal explanations. Some of this information will originate from the actual situation, while other information is stored in the person's memory as experiences from past events. Weiner states that in real situations there are a large number of possible causes for success and failure (Weiner, 1989), and he hypothesized that attributions would hinge on three dimensions; locus of causality (internal vs. external), stability (whether the causes change over time), and controllability (whether the cause can be changed by the person; Weiner, 1985).

Locus of control was proposed by Heider (1958), and is the most fundamental dimension in attribution theory (Homsma, Dyck, Gilder, Koopman, & Elfring, 2007). Weiner and colleagues later redefined this causal dimension into locus of causality, so that the dimension locus (of control) was differentiated from perceived control (Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest, & Rosenbaum, 1971). Apart from being internal or external (locus of causality), a cause can be seen as stable or unstable, i.e., being constant over time or likely to change. A third causal dimension, which also originated from Heider, was connected to the model for classification of the

² International Coaching Federation, www.coachfederation.org

causal dimensions (Rosenbaum, 1972). Rosenbaum originally called this dimension *intentionality*, while Weiner chose to call it *controllability*. This dimension was a result of the recognition that causes like effort, mood, and fatigue, which are all internal and unstable causes, differ as to the degree of control that can be exerted over them.

Causal attributions are important because of their tendencies to influence future behaviour through their influence on both motivation and affect (Anderson, Krull, & Weiner, 1996; Weiner, 1985). The perceived stability of causes influences expectations of success and all three causal dimensions influence a variety of emotional experiences (Anderson, Krull, & Weiner, 1996; Weiner, 1985). Theorists agree that people have a general tendency to utilize both self-protecting and self-enhancing patterns of attribution (Miller & Ross, 1975; Skaalvik, 1990, 1994; Zuckerman, 1979; Withley & Frieze, 1985). This implies that individuals tend to attribute their own successes to internal factors such as effort and ability, and failures to external factors. In short, humans tend to take credit for their own achievements by attributing them to factors for which they are responsible, whereas failures are more often explained using external factors where the situation is responsible. Martinko (1995) calls these two types of attribution *dispositional* and *situational*. Dispositional attributions ascribe a person's behaviour or achievements to internal factors such as personality traits or ability, while situational attribution ascribes a person's behaviour or achievements to external factors such as social influence from other people (e.g., leadership). This is what Weiner calls a *self-protecting attribution pattern* (Weiner, 1986). However, self-protection in the ego defensive sense might not be an adaptive pattern when subsequent progress, learning, and performance are the main goal. The reason for this is the importance of perceived controllability for subsequent effort and choices. People cannot optimally improve their achievement if they perceive themselves to have little control over the causal factor which leads to the specific achievement. Responsibility and controllability are therefore generally desirable causal attributions (Arkin & Maruyama, 1979).

In general, internal, unstable, and controllable attributions after a failure (effort and strategy) lead to more functionally determined behaviour and emotions than other types of attributions (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Bandura, 1997; Weiner, 1985). Functional task behaviour is defined here as high persistence and accuracy (Chapin & Dyck, 1976; Fowler & Peterson, 1981; Schunk, 1981). The expectation of performing these tasks successfully in the future may be maintained if the individual believes that they can control the cause of the behaviour (Bandura, 1997). Attribution to internal, stable, and uncontrollable causes after failure, such as lack of ability, but also attribution to external causes, may over time lead to irresolution and learned helplessness because the

individuals perceives that they have little control over the cause of their own behaviour (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Maier & Seligman, 1976; Dweck, 1975).

Humans often use information on the basis of the outcome of specific situations to decide how much energy or effort to spend in the situation (Weiner & Kukla, 1970; Kukla, 1972). The reason for this is that effort and outcome are seen as related variables. Because of this, if one experiences great performance, one concludes that effort was high, while failure is attributed to a lack of effort. A review of attributional training confirms that increasing the individuals' attributions of failure to a lack of effort is a strategy which has been consistently successful in increasing persistence and performance (Fösterling, 1985). This makes sense if the person didn't put much effort into the situation and subsequently failed. One may question, however, if attribution to lack of effort is adaptive or even possible after maximum effort? A number of careers in today's society, such as the participants in this study, are demanding and expect high levels of effort from people. In such a case, one may question if it is possible to conclude and believe that failure to produce expected results is due to lack of effort. To answer this question we need to investigate theories related to causal attributions and performance.

Strategy - the plan of action. Research has shown that reflection upon the accomplishment of one's actions after the event has been a very effective tool for improving performance (Baird, Holland, & Deacon, 1999; Busby, 1999; Dwyer, Oser, Salas, & Fowlkes, 1999; Ellis & Davidi, 2005; Ellis, Mendel, & Nir, 2006). This implies that reviewing the successful or unsuccessful strategies used during an event changes the individual's mental models and improves their actions in similar future events. This post-event review elicits more internal (as opposed to external) and specific attributions (as opposed to general).

Ron, Lipshitz, and Popper (2001), who studied "post-flight-reviews" in the Israeli Air Force, quoted pilots as saying that the most important element of the self-debriefing is proving that they made the error and that it was their responsibility (locus). This implies causal attribution to internal causes. Once they had done that, performance improvement was seen as the next natural step, as taking responsibility for errors was essential to doing better the next time around. However, this might not always hold true because of the importance of controllability. If they perform better the next time around, their actions should differ somewhat from the previous unsuccessful situation. This implies that their strategy in the situation has changed because of their review of previous actions in similar situations. The causal attribution dimension in this case can therefore be defined as *strategy*.

Strategy is both unstable and controllable since the individual has an opportunity to influence and change it (controllability).

This shows that taking responsibility might not be enough; controllability over the causal factor explaining behaviour also may be essential. Nakanishi (2004) found a significant increase in self-efficacy among high school students after a period of focusing on strategy attribution after a successful behaviour. Learning strategies are presumed to have a greater influence on self-efficacy than attributing failure to effort (Ito, 1996). These results show that attribution to strategy, for both successful and unsuccessful experiences, might improve subsequent performance. It's obvious that a general cause of an outcome, e.g., the lack of effort, is less informative than a specific cause, e.g., an aspect of the strategy during accomplishment. As supported by Abrahamson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978), knowledge of the specific factors leading to a specific performance is more useful for guiding subsequent behaviour and performance.

This is of great relevance to attribution theory. Controllable, internal, unstable, and specific attributions are favourable. There is also evidence that focusing on strategy through self-monitoring and self-instruction can be a remedy for helplessness among children (Diener & Dweck, 1978). This raises the question of whether lack of effort is too general as a causal explanation and whether specific attributions would be favorable, especially in situations where high effort is a matter of necessity.

Strategy as a causal dimension. The positive result that arises from reviewing one's performance after the event (Baird, Holland, & Deacon, 1999; Busby, 1999; Dwyer, Oser, Salas, & Fowlkes, 1999; Ellis & Davidi, 2005; Ellis, Mendel, & Nir, 2006) is a reflection upon one's strategy adopted in that specific situation, which implies that two dimensions in particular are key: (a) awareness of and insight into the situation and the strategy adopted, and (b) the self-reflection upon one's strategy implementation and resultant performance in the situation. This provides evidence that strategy, and especially attribution to strategy, is a complex area.

Strategy is the plan of action individuals use to achieve their goals or accomplish a task (VandenBos, 2006), which means that strategy is supposed to characterise the working process. Strategy is categorized as an internal, unstable, and controllable cause of attribution (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2005). While effort provides information about the intensity of the working process, strategy describes the quality of the plan of action related to the working process. It's obvious that effort is required to apply strategies (Borkowski, Carr, Rellinger, & Pressley, 1990), and that the amount of effort could be vital for successful strategy implementation and resultant performance. However, the above review shows that this may not be sufficient. To be successful, strategy has to be effective and efficient in any specific situation and has to be changed when it is not adaptive.

Since two major responsibilities for a coach are to elicit coachee generated solutions and strategies, and to hold the coachee responsible and accountable in the learning process (ICF, 2010), one effect from coaching should be to increase the tendency to attribute achievement outcomes to internal, unstable, and controllable factors. Based on this the following hypothesis was developed: H1: *Executive coaching strengthens executive's causal attributions to internal, unstable, and controllable factors, such as effort and strategy.*

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Twenty-two executives in a branch leading Norwegian Fortune 500 company were asked to voluntarily participate in an experiment over a period of one year. The executives in the study were the company's CEOs (Chief Executive Officers). Thus, they were the highest level of leadership in the company. Of the twenty-two CEOs, twelve were randomly chosen for the experiment group in the project, and ten were chosen for the control group.

Pretest-posttest control group design

After the assignment of CEOs to experimental and control groups, a pre-test was administered. An online questionnaire measured the CEO's perceived causality concerning their performances at work. Then an executive coaching programme was administered for a period of one year. Out of the twenty-two executives who were asked to voluntarily participate in the project, 20 participated on the pre-test (12 in the experiment group and 8 in the control group), and 19 participated on the post-test after one year (11 in the experiment group and 8 in the control group).

The experimental group (executive coaching programme). Three external coaches were involved in the executive coaching programme which involved both group and individual coaching. All three coaches used the same approach in their coaching process. The strategic coaching process was developed, led, and managed by an experienced coach with a MCC³ (Master Certified Coach) credential. During group coaching (May-December), the executives who participated in the coaching programme were divided into three different groups of four executives each. Each group completed four group coaching sessions for about three hours with the external coaches in the project. For individual external executive coaching (January-March), each executive who participated in the coaching programme completed seven individual coaching sessions with external coaches. The coaching sessions lasted for about 1-1½ hours and were completed both through face-to-face meetings and by telephone. The specific intent from the company and the main goal of the coaching programme was to support the executive's development and progress as leaders.

³ Master Certified Coach assessed and approved by the International Coaching Federation.

The control group. The CEOs who were chosen for the control group continued their daily routines as CEOs in the company during the experiment. Thus, they were not invited to participate in individual or group coaching processes. Since all the CEOs mainly operated within their different departments where they had management responsibility on the daily basis, the coaching programme with the CEOs in the experiment group was completed with no negative remarks from the CEOs in the control group.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was based on previously developed scales proven to hold both satisfactory levels of validity and reliability. The instrument was translated into Norwegian from its original English and slightly adjusted by the author for the purpose of this study.

Attribution. Attribution was measured by means of the 20- item Forced Choice Attributional Style Assessment Test (ASAT - I) developed by Anderson, Jennings, and Arnoult (1988). The scale was modified and used to measure intrapersonal attributional style in specific, work-related situations. Items measuring interpersonal behaviour were not included in the modified version, as well as the choices relating to personality traits and mood. Attributions in general situations, such as “You have failed to complete the crossword puzzle in the daily paper,” are not relevant to specific work performance, and were thus taken out of the original test. This resulted in a six item questionnaire for specific work-related situations (three for positive outcomes and three for negative outcomes). Four different choices were offered for each item, relating to strategy, ability, effort and circumstances, which gave us eight different sub-scales. The participants were asked to consider the causality of their performance at work on a seven point scale, ranging from completely untrue (1) to completely true (7), for each of the four variables (strategy, effort, ability, and circumstances). The adjusted measurement was not a forced-choice as in the original, because of the desire to investigate relationships between the different choices. For example (item 1, positive outcome), the item “You have just received successful feedback on tasks performed at work” had these four choices: (a) “I used the correct strategy to achieve it,” (b) “I’m good at this,” (c) “I worked really hard to achieve it,” and (d) “Other circumstances (e.g., people, situation) influenced the result.”

Instrument reliability. The reliability of the instrument was high, with a Cronbach’s Alpha above .82 for all scales. The Cronbach’s Alpha of the instrument is shown in Table 1.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the statistical means and the standard deviations of the causal attribution pattern among the participants for both the pre- and the post-test in the investigation. Table 1

also shows the p-values from the independent samples t-test, analysing differences in variable values between the experiment group and the control group, and the Cronbach's alpha for the measurements used in the study. The values are separated into the two major groups, the experiment group and the control group. Table 1 also shows the relative effect sizes of Cohen's d for the experiment group (Cohen, 1992).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations (SD), p-values, and Cohen's effect size for experimental and control groups

| Study variables | Experimental group (N=11) | | | | Cohen's Effect size | Control group (N=8) | | | | Cronbach's Alpha | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----|-------------|-----|---------------------|---------------------|------|------|------|------------------|------|-----|
| | Pre | | Post | | | Pre | | Post | | Pre | Post | |
| | mean | SD | mean | SD | | mean | SD | mean | SD | | | |
| 1. Attribution success strategy | 17.3 | 2.3 | 19.5 | 1.9 | ** | 1,09 | 18.1 | 1.9 | 18.3 | 0.9 | .85 | .90 |
| 2. Attribution success ability | 16.9 | 1.5 | 19.2 | 2.5 | * | 1,17 | 17.8 | 1.8 | 17.8 | 1.4 | .85 | .90 |
| 3. Attribution success effort | 16.2 | 3.1 | 18.4 | 2.3 | | 0,85 | 17.0 | 3.7 | 16.9 | 3.7 | .88 | .93 |
| 4. Attribution success circumstances | 15.5 | 2.5 | 14.8 | 5.8 | | 0,16 | 14.3 | 4.2 | 15.0 | 3.9 | .83 | .91 |
| 5. Attribution failure strategy | 13.3 | 3.4 | 14.8 | 6.8 | | 0,29 | 14.6 | 4.1 | 15.6 | 2.6 | .80 | .85 |
| 6. Attribution failure ability | 12.1 | 3.5 | 8,5 | 4.8 | * | 0,90 | 10.4 | 4.6 | 11.6 | 5.4 | .82 | .90 |
| 7. Attribution failure effort | 15.0 | 3.0 | 13.6 | 5.7 | | 0,32 | 13.0 | 5.8 | 15.0 | 4.1 | .88 | .88 |
| 8. Attribution failure circumstances | 10.3 | 3.6 | 9.5 | 5.0 | | 0,19 | 10.9 | 3.7 | 11.5 | 3.7 | .84 | .88 |

Note. Significant changes in variable values between the pre- and the post-test are marked with bold (* = $p < .05$) and (** = $p < .01$).

Copyright © 2010 by Frode Moen. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

There were significant differences in values only in the experiment group in this study: causal attribution of success to strategy and ability were significantly higher, whereas causal attribution of failure to ability was significantly lower at the post-test. Cohen's effect sizes (d), which measures the strengths of the differences in values between the pre- and the post-test, were very large (≥ 1.10) for causal attribution of success to strategy and ability, and large ($\geq .75$ and < 1.10) for causal attribution of success to effort (this effect was not significant) and causal attribution of failure to ability (Cohen, 1992).

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of executive coaching on causal attributions. The prediction, specified in the hypothesis, was partly confirmed. The hypothesis predicted an increased tendency to make causal attributions to internal, unstable, and controllable factors, such as effort and strategy. The

findings from the paired sample t-test (Table 1) and Cohen's effect size (d) support that external executive coaching increases causal attributions to strategy for successful achievements. Further, Cohen's effect size (d) also supports that external executive coaching increases causal attributions to effort for successful achievements. Interestingly, the findings from the paired sample t-test (Table 1) and Cohen's effect size (d) also show that external executive coaching increases causal attributions of successful achievements to ability. Additionally, the findings show that causal attribution of unsuccessful achievements to internal, stable, and uncontrollable factors, such as ability, decreases. There are however no significant changes for causal attributions of unsuccessful achievements to effort or strategy. In comparison, there were no significant changes in the control group.

As discussed, building awareness and responsibility through empowering the coachee are two key principles in coaching. Awareness and responsibility are closely connected, since responsibility involves the ability to be aware of something to begin with. People cannot take responsibility for something for which they are unaware. The coach is a facilitator for the coachee's deep reflections upon their own learning experiences related to a case under discussion. Thus, there is a potential in coaching that important information related to the case in focus will emerge during the process, and there will be an increased possibility for the coachee to draw new, better conclusions. Coaching therefore has the potential to increase the coachee's awareness of the factors that influence performance and to focus on the most relevant and important information. The results from this study indicate that the coaching process affects the coachee's interpretations of their own causal attributions.

First of all, goal setting is an important and essential part of coaching. After reviewing the case from several different perspectives with the coachee, the process then focuses on setting clear goals for future achievements (Moen, 2009). Second, during the goal setting phase, the coach invites the coachee to reflect upon and choose efficient and effective goal attainment strategies. Effective coaching is therefore supposed to end up with clear goals for future achievements, and efficient and effective learning and development strategies which are directed towards the coachee's goal attainment. Thus, there is an integrated focus on the cause-and-effect relationship between the coachee's strategy and their intended improved performance and goal achievement. Third, recurrent coachee effort is required to apply any strategy, and the amount of effort could be vital for successful strategy implementation and the resultant performance. The coaching process is supposed to enable strategy articulation and strategy execution. Therefore, it was expected that the coaching experiment would affect causal attribution to both strategy and effort. Interestingly, this effect is just found related to causal attributions for successful achievement. Causal attributions for unsuccessful

achievements to strategy and effort have no significant changes as a result from the coaching experiment.

A possible explanation of these results can be the positive asset search which characterized the coaching approach. The executives were encouraged to focus on their successes and positive assets; their unsuccessful achievements were not focused on to the same extent. Causal attributions for unsuccessful achievements to strategy and effort were therefore not affected as a result from the experiment. In fact, these results strengthen the argument raised in this study: what is focused on in coaching reflects the coachees' causal attributions. Since the coaching process is focused on a positive asset search and the things the coachee can do (as contrasted to things that are unsuccessful), the main effects are found for causal attributions related to successful achievements.

Another interesting and surprising result is that the greatest effect from the experiment is found related to the executives' causal attributions for successful achievement to ability (Table 1, Cohen's Effect size). A possible explanation for this result is the same argument as above: the positive asset search which characterized the coaching approach affected causal attributions to competency factors such as ability. The coach stimulated the coachee to reflect upon their own experiences and what the coachee could do, as opposed to what they could not do. The coachee's strengths and positive assets were in focus. Also, the coachee was empowered and stimulated by the coach to find solutions to their own problems. This might result in strengthened beliefs in their own capability, ability, and competence. When reviewing the results from causal attributions of unsuccessful achievements to ability, this argument is strengthened; causal attributions to ability for unsuccessful achievements decrease. Thus, the beliefs in their own capability and ability are not reduced as much as before the experiment when the executives experience unsuccessful achievements. The results indicate, therefore, that coaching stimulates the executives' beliefs in their own ability. Interestingly and importantly, building the coachee's self-beliefs is the underlying intent of every coaching interaction (Moen, 2009; Whitmore, 2002).

In conclusion, coaching appears to stimulate the coachee to take control of their own learning by raising awareness of the factors that influence their achievements. There is a heightened focus on the coachee's controllability and responsibility in the process. Thus, causal attributions to internal and controllable factors such as effort and strategy are affected for causal attributions for successful achievements. Further, the focus on the coachee's strengths and positive assets in coaching stimulates the coachee's beliefs in their own competence and ability. Therefore, causal attributions to ability for successful achievements increase and causal attributions for unsuccessful achievements to ability decrease. Further studies may enable this set of complex issues to be better and more fully understood.

RESOURCE

International Coach Federation, www.coachfederation.org

REFERENCES

- Abramson, L. Y., Seligman, M. E. P., & Teasdale, J. D. (1978). Learned helplessness in humans: Critique and reformulation. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 87*, 49-74.
- Anderson, C. A., Krull, D. S., & Weiner, B. (1996). Explanations: Process and consequences. In E. T. Higgins & A.W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 271-296). New York: Guilford Press.
- Arkin, R. M., & Maruyama, G. M. (1979). Attribution, affect, and college exam performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 71*, 85-93.
- Baird, L., Holland, P., & Deacon, S. (1999). Learning from action: Imbedding more learning into the performance fast enough to make a difference. *Organizational Dynamics, 27*, 19-32.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: the exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.
- Borkowski, J. G., Carr, M., Rellinger, E., & Pressley, M. (1990). Self-regulated cognition: Interdependence of metacognition, attributions, and self-esteem. In B. F. Jones & L. Idol (Eds.), *Dimension of thinking and cognitive instruction*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Busby, J. S. (1999). The effectiveness of collective retrospection as a mechanism of organizational learning. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 35*, 109-129.
- Chapin, M., & Dyck, D. G. (1976). Persistence in children's reading behaviour as a function of N length and attribution retraining. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 85*, 511-515.
- Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin, 112*, 155-159.
- Diener, C. I., & Dweck, C. S. (1978). An analysis of learned helplessness: Continuous changes in performance, strategy, and achievement cognitions following failure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 36*, 451-462.
- Downey, M. (1999). *Effective coaching*. London: Orion Business.
- Dweck, C. S. (1975). Role of expectations and attributions in alleviation of learned helplessness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 31*, 674-685.
- Dwyer, D. J., Oser, R. L., Salas, E., & Fowlkes, J. E. (1999). Performance measurement in distributed environments: Initial results and implications for training. *Military Psychology, 11*, 189-215.
- Ellis, S., & Davidi, I. (2005). After-event reviews: Drawing lessons from failed and successful events. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*, 857-871.
- Ellis, S., Mendel, R., & Nir, M. (2006). Learning from successful and failed experience: The moderating role of kind of after-event review. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*, 669-680.
- Fillery-Travis, A., & Lane, D. (2006). Does coaching work or are we asking the wrong questions? *International Coaching Psychology Review, 1*(1), 23-36.
- Flaherty, J. (1999). *Coaching. Evoking excellence in others*. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Fowler, J. W., & Peterson, P. L. (1981). Increasing reading persistence and altering attributional style of learned helpless children. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 73*, 251-160.

- Fösterling, F. (1985). Attributional retraining: A review. *Psychological Bulletin*, *98*, 495-512.
- Gallwey, T. (1997). *The inner game of tennis* (Rev. ed.). New York: Random House.
- Grant, A. M. (2006). Workplace and executive coaching: A bibliography from the scholarly business literature. In A. M. Grant & D. R. Stober (Eds.), *Evidence-based coaching*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Hall, D. T., Otazo, K. L., & Hollenbeck, G. P. (1999). Behind closed doors: What really happens in executive coaching? *Organizational Dynamics*, *27*, 39-53.
- Hargrove, R. (2003). *Masterful coaching*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: Wiley.
- Homsma, G. J., Dyck, C., V, Gilder, D. D., Koopman, P. L., & Elfring, T. (2007). Overcoming errors: A closer look at the attributional mechanism. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *21*, 559-583.
- International Coach Federation. (2010). The ICF website. Retrieved from <http://www.coachfederation.org/ICF/>
- Kinlaw, D. C. (1989). *Coaching for commitment*. San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Co.
- Kelley, H. (1967). Attribution theory in social psychology. In D. Levine (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, *15*, 192-238. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Lai, L. (2004). *Strategisk kompetansestyling*. Bergen, Norway: Fagbokforlaget.
- Maier, S. F., & Seligman, M. E. P. (1976). Learned helplessness: Theory and evidence. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *105*, 3-46.
- Martinko, M. J. (1995). *Attribution theory: An organizational perspective*. Delray Beach, FL: St. Lucie Press.
- Miller, D. T., & Ross, M. (1975). Self-serving biases in the attribution of causality: Fact or fiction? *Psychological Bulletin*, *82*, 213-225.
- Moen, F. (2009). *Coaching and performance psychology*. Department of Education, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, Doctoral dissertation.
- Moen, F., & Kvalsund, R. (2008). What communications or relational factors characterize the method, skills and techniques of executive coaching? *IJCO The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations™*, *6*(2), 102-123.
- Morgan, H., Harkins, P., & Marshall, G. (Eds.). (2005). *The art and practice of leadership coaching. 50 top executive coaches reveal their secrets*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Nakanishi, Y. (2004). Effects of strategy attribution for success/ failure on self-efficacy. *Japanese Journal of Education Psychology*, *52*, 127-138.
- Ron, N., Lipshitz, R., & Popper, M. (2001). *Post-flight reviews in an F-16 fighter squadron: An application of a multi-facet model of organizational learning*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Haifa, Israel.
- Rosenbaum, R. M. (1972). A dimensional analysis of the perceived causes of success and failure (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, 1972). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *33*, 5040.
- Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs*, *33*, 300-303.

- Schein, E. H. (2006). Coaching and consultation revisited: Are they the same? In M. Goldsmith & L. Lyons (Eds.), *Coaching for leadership*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer & Co.
- Schraw, G., & Moshman, D. (1995). Metacognitive theories. *Educational Psychology Review*, 7, 351-373.
- Schunk, D. H. (1981). Modelling and attributional effects on children's achievement: A self-efficacy analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 73, 93-105.
- Skaalvik, E. M. (1990). Gender differences in general academic self-concept and success expectations on defined academic problems. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82, 591-598.
- Skaalvik, E. M. (1994). Attribution of perceived achievement in school in general and in maths and verbal areas: Relations with academic self-concept and self-esteem. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 64, 133-143.
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2005). *Skolen som læringsarena: Selvopfatning, motivasjon og læring*. Oslo, Norway: Oslo Universitetsforlaget.
- VandenBos, G. R. (2006). *APA: Dictionary of psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Weiner, B., Frieze, I. H., Kukla, A., Reed, L., Rest, S., & Rosenbaum, R. M. (1971). *Perceiving the causes of success and failure*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.
- Weiner, B. (1972). *Theories of motivation: From mechanism to cognition*. Chicago: Markham.
- Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review*, 92, 548-573.
- Weiner, B. (1986). *An attributional theory of motivation and emotion*. New York: Springer.
- Weiner, B. (1989). *Human motivation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Weiner, B. (1995). *Judgement of responsibility: A foundation for a theory of social conduct*. New York: Guilford.
- Withley, B. E., & Frieze, I. H. (1985). Children's causal attribution for success and failure in achievement settings: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 5, 608-616.
- Whitmore, J. (2002). *Coaching for performance. Growing people, performance and purpose* (3rd ed.). London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Zuckerman, M. (1979). Attribution of success and failure revisited: The motivational bias is alive and well in attribution theory. *Journal of Personality*, 47, 245-287.

■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frode Moen, PhD

Phone: +47 72 56 81 76

Email: firmoe@online.no

Dr. Moen is Director of the Olympic sport centre in Middle Norway and mental trainer/coach for elite athletes. He is the former coach in Nordic combined skiing for 13 years, five of them as a head coach for the national A and B teams in Norway. His teams won medals at the 2007 world championship in Sapporo (silver and bronze), the 2006 Olympic Games in Torino (silver and bronze), and the 2005 world championship in Oberstdorf (gold, silver, and bronze). He received his doctorate in Coaching and Performance Psychology from the Department of Education, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU.

Resource Center for Professional Coaching in Organizations

IJCO The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations™ is the signature publication of Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.™ (PCPI). In addition to this internationally acclaimed journal, PCPI publishes books on topics of interest to those in the coaching community, whether practitioner, decision maker, or end user. You can count on PCPI, Inc. to provide content that pushes the envelope — bringing theory, research and application together in ways that inform, engage and provoke. Visit the PCPI website, www.pcpionline.com, to view and purchase our growing line of products.

If you have administrative questions, please refer them to our *IJCO*™ Office Manager, at officemanager@ijco.info. For advertising, marketing and operations inquiries, please refer them to John B. Lazar, *IJCO* Executive Editor, at john@ijco.info. Please submit unsolicited manuscripts for peer review consideration to the *IJCO* office manager at officemanager@ijco.info.

Visit Both Our Sites at Your Convenience

Journal information:
www.ijco.info

Purchases:
www.pcpionline.com

