



Reflecting pathways to
learning and change



F. Campone, Inc. Newsletter

Currents in Coaching Research Bridging Coaching-Related Research and Practice vol. 1, no.1

Welcome to the first issue of Currents in Coaching Research, a privately produced newsletter which seeks to bridge coaching-related research and coaching practice. In each issue, I will focus on a specific coaching-related question and provide a summary of two or three articles which have appeared in peer-reviewed journals or are published by coaching-related professional associations. I'll offer some observations for readers with a researcher lens and observations for readers with a practitioner's eye. Readers are invited to contact me with recommendations for topics or articles to review. Feedback is very welcome.

Currents in Coaching Research: What Do Coaching Clients Value?

The studies in a nutshell

In 1998, the International Coach Federation surveyed 210 clients of ICF members. The survey asked about client demographics (gender, age, education); how clients found their coaches, the length of the relationship, the method of coaching interaction and client perceptions of coach training and certification. Both business coaching and life coaching clients were among the respondents. Among the findings were: that 84.8% of respondents characterize the coach's role as a sounding board; 78.1% saw the role as motivator; and 56.7% responded friend. Asked about the focus of their coaching, 80.5% selected time management; 74.3% selected career, and 73.6% chose business. (Note: For these two items, respondents were invited to select as many choices as were applicable.)

Valerie Creane's study, "Personal Coaching from the Client's Perspective" (Proceedings of the Third International Coach Federation Coaching Research Symposium, available through www.coachfederation.org) explored the nature and impact of coaching from the perspective of personal coaching clients. Creane found thirteen major themes through her analysis of interview results. Eight of these themes describe the coaching process, suggesting the process value for clients lies in identifying client wants; shifting client perspectives; powerful coach-client relationships; client self-discovery; focus on present and future; client accountability; challenge to internal barriers; and focus on client agenda. The coaching skills valued by clients included listening, asking thought-provoking questions and providing validation or acknowledgement. The importance of coaching included greater client awareness of their desires; self-discovery; forward movement and positive self-regard.

Marywayne Bush ("Client Perceptions of Effectiveness in Executive Coaching", Proceedings of the Second ICF Coaching Research Symposium, available through www.coachfederation.org) conducted in-depth interviews with executives who had received coaching. The purpose of her study was to understand the elements of effective executive coaching from a client perspective. Bush identified six factors: client commitment; the coach's contribution (including coach personality, coaching skills and personal supportiveness); structured coaching processes that focus on client development; inclusion of others where appropriate to extend the client's support network and create a coaching culture; rapport and relationship with the coach; results that benefited the client both personally and professionally.

The Researcher Lens

The ICF survey was designed by a professional consulting firm. Participants were solicited through ICF member

coaches with client responses submitted directly to the scorers. The survey instrument was a multiple choice check off with options to select more than once choice on questions regarding the role of the coach, coaching issues and outcomes. Survey results were reported in the form of descriptive statistics with brief summary narratives.

Creane's qualitative method study relied on in-depth interviews with eight long-term clients of coaches certified by CTI. She used a purposive sampling method. Interviews were conducted using an interview guide with open-ended questions. Data were analyzed using an inductive methodology resulting in thick descriptions of client perspectives.

Bush's approach is retrospective, appreciative and phenomenological. Potential participants were identified through a network sampling method, with twelve selected for a non-random, purposive, heterogeneous sample of corporate executives who had received coaching from an external coach. Data resulting from an appreciative interview using open-ended questions were transcribed, reviewed by participants and analyzed at three levels: individual responses to two direct questions on effectiveness; other individual comments on effectiveness; and a trans-situational analysis resulting in clustered thematic groupings.

The Coaching Lens

The specific topic focus of coaching sessions may differ somewhat for executive and life coaching clients, although that assumption cannot be determined conclusively from these three studies. Where all three studies do intersect is in pointing to specific aspects of coaching that clients perceive contribute value: (1) the intimate and unique qualities of the coach-client relationship; (2) the client-directed focus of the interactions; (3) specific coach skills, especially deep listening, effective questioning and providing reinforcement and acknowledgement.

One finding in Bush's study is especially relevant to coaching in a corporate environment. Bush found that effectiveness in corporate coaching is a shared responsibility between client, coach and organization. The organization's responsibility takes the form of ensuring a culture that supports learning and development and financially sponsoring structured coaching programs. A related finding in Bush's study points to the importance of client motivation, openness to the process and commitment to carry through in creative an effective coaching engagement.

Taken together, the outcomes of these three studies invite coaches to consider several aspects of their coaching structure and relationships. These include

- the levels of client commitment and readiness to change and the levels and form of corporate commitment to coaching
- the structures and strategies used to deliberately create client trust and connection, including clear agreements about confidentiality in organizational settings
- clarity in organizational settings about who owns the coaching agenda

What's your experience?

Francine Campone, Ed.D., PCC coaches mature professionals to reinvent their lives by reinventing their work. She is a leader in the coaching research community and deeply committed to the development of reflective coaches in practice and to fostering coaching research. Francine teaches evidence-based coaching and coaching research practices for UTD and enjoys a wonderful life in Denver, Colorado beyond her activities in the coaching field. You may reach her directly at francine@reinventinglife.net.
