Academic Paper

A Q Methodology Study: How Do Coaches Foster the Coaching Relationship?

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Abstract

There have been numerous studies which demonstrate the importance of the coaching relationship and its relevance in ensuring the successful outcome of the coaching process. However, there has been little exploration of the coach's perspective; how do they make sense of their ability to foster coaching relationships in practice? Q-methodology was used to elicit possible meaning schemes that underpin this capability. Four distinct viewpoints were identified which provided the foundation for a 'relationship styles framework' that reflected the range of ways coaches work with complexity, ambiguity and holistic understanding in the management of coach client relations.

Introduction

When I ask coaching colleagues the question 'what is the key ingredient that leads to a successful outcome with your clients?', their answers always make some reference to the coaching relationship. This is unsurprising, as numerous studies on this topic suggest that De Haan (2008) is not alone in viewing the relationship as being 'centre stage' to coaching practice. While academic and practitioner literature offers insight into the theoretical concepts that underpin a coach's ability to build the relationship, there has been little exploration of *how* coaches develop this capability in practice. Addressing this issue has relevance for practitioners, supervisors and coach educators as there is a compelling argument for viewing the ability to establish, maintain and develop the coaching relationship as a core capability.

Adult learning and constructive developmental theories provide a starting point in answering this question. They suggest that we demonstrate skills in practice when new knowledge results in an 'update' of thoughts, feelings and beliefs (Bruner, 2006; Taylor, 2008; Dirkx and Mezirow, 2006; Kegan, 1980). Learning can be viewed as a 'process of qualitative change in attitudes, values and understanding of our experience' (Taylor, 2008, p. 10). It is this meaning-making that underpins our

ability to respond spontaneously and appropriately in unique and complex coaching situations. This concept informed my key objective, to elicit 'meaning schemes' that underpin a coach's ability to foster the relationship in practice.

Q-methodology lends itself to this type of investigation. The qualitative aspects allowed participants to express their subjective opinions while the quantitative analysis identified the patterns which represented the range of viewpoints. These different perspectives offer a way of enhancing our understanding of how coaches conceptualise their ability to manage the relationship in practice. The aspiration was to synthesise the findings in a framework that would provide a lens for practitioners to explore their perspectives and experience and consider how to enhance and develop this aspect of their coaching repertoire.

This paper starts with a review of the aspects of the literature that had relevance for understanding how practitioners make sense on the coaching relationship and providing the context for the approach. It continues with an overview of my research methodology, design and analysis of the results. The body of the paper explores the participants' different perspectives on the coaching relationship and provides the rationale for the 'Relationship Styles Framework'. The conclusion reflects on the implications for practitioners in enhancing their ability to foster their client relationships and acknowledges the limitations of the study and opportunities for further research.

Literature Review

There is virtually unanimous agreement in the academic and practitioner literature on the significance of the coaching relationship as the agent of change (Jowett et al., 2010; Rogers, 2012; Hawkins, 2013; Kimsey-House, 2011) and its influence in determining successful outcomes There is also a recognition that a focus on the ability to foster the coaching relationship is a core element of a coach's training and development (Fillery-Travis and Collins, 2017; Gray, 2011; Lane, 2017).

In the last 10 years, academics have explored various aspects of the coaching relationship (De Haan et al., 2016). Many of these investigations have been informed by discourses on therapeutic relationships, where numerous studies provided confirmation that there are several common factors, one of which is the 'working alliance', rather than a specific approach that underpins success (McKenna and Davis, 2009; Kehle and Bray, 2003). While there is little specific discourse on how coaches develop the ability to manage the coaching relationship in practice, the discussions on coach education and development have relevance for this issue. In these conversations there is a consensus that creating, maintaining and developing the relationship is an important element of a coach's training and development.

There is an academic debate that challenges an assumption that assimilating a repertoire of skills and competencies is enough to enable practitioners to demonstrate ability in practice (Bachkirova et al., 2017; Bachkirova and Lawton Smith, 2015; Lane, 2017; Laske 2006; Garvey, 2017). Many authors have acknowledged that a theoretical understanding of concepts and skills do not translate into the application of knowledge in the unique and complex situations we deal with on a daily basis (Alvesson, 2001; Cavanagh and Lane, 2012). These views are given weight by adult learning and constructive developmental theories that imply that our ability to act in practice is determined by our own 'meaning making', that is, how we individually interpret and make sense of relevant concepts (Bruner, 2006; Taylor, 2008; Dirkx and Mezirow, 2006; Kegan, 1980).

Exploration definitions of 'the coaching relationship' literature give some insight into how coaches may view the characteristics of the coaching relationship. Many authors consider the principle of collaborative partnership and balance of power between coach and the client as a feature which differentiates the coaching relationship from the majority of professional relationships (O'Brion and Palmer, 2009; Ianiro et al., 2013). This is also a theme in practitioner literature (Rogers, 2012;

Hawkins, 2013; Kimsey-House, 2011) and a stance endorsed by the ethical standards and professional codes of conduct of the Association of Coaching, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, and the International Coaching Federation.

The concept of the working alliance is also likely to inform the practitioner's view of the relationship as its significance is reflected in academic and practitioner literature. The term was first used to describe the therapeutic relationship (Borodin, 1979), encompassing three interrelated features, goals, tasks, and bonds. There is a significant emerging body of research that suggests these elements correlate with positive outcomes of the coaching process (O'Brion and Palmer, 2010; Jowett et al., 2012; Boyce et al., 2010; Gan and Chong, 2015). In addition, goal-setting, the tasks of coaching and creating rapport are topics in many of the practitioner texts (Whitmore, 2009; Rogers, 2012; Starr, 2016; Cox, 2013).

A third element that has relevance for how practitioners view the coaching relationship is the recognition that the relationship evolves and develops over a period of time (Ianiro et al., 2013). Several authors recognise the need to have relationship-building skills that focus on the longer term (Boone, 2017) and highlight the value of coaches being explicit in discussing 'renegotiating the goals tasks and bonds' (O'Broin and Palmer, 2009, p.186.).

The recognition that the relationship develops over time is another element that is likely to be reflected in how we make meaning of the relationship. Clarkson focused on the therapeutic relationship, conceptualising that it altered over time (2003). She considered the working alliance to be the basis of the relationship from which the 'person-to-person relationship', the 'core or the real relationship' (2003, p.152) would emerge. This concept of stages in the development of the coaching relationship and importance of the interpersonal connection is also supported by various studies (Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007; Natale and Diamante, 2005). What has not been explored is how practitioners view the interpersonal element of the coaching relationship, whether it is viewed as the coaching relationship in its entirety or, as Clarkson (2003) suggests, a developmental stage where the most meaningful work occurs.

While it is likely that coaches will conceptualise the interpersonal relationship in different ways, the importance of trust and rapport is likely to be acknowledged (DuToit, 2014; Cox, 2012; De Haan, 2008) as a number of authors consider trust and rapport-building skills to play a key role in managing the coaching relationship (Gregory and Levy, 2011; Gan and Chong, 2015; Boyce et al., 2010).

Finally, there is likely to be an appreciation of the role of self in how we make sense of the relationship. This may reflect a concept of self as the instrument (Bachkirova, 2016), as we work with the unpredictable nature of ever-changing dynamics of the coach client relationship. There may also be a recognition of the ability to work with psychological mindfulness and depth (Lee, 2003; Mackin, 2010) and being able to change behaviour based on an evaluation of what is happening in the moment (Baron et al., 2011).

While many studies offer a conceptual understanding of the knowledge skills and attributes that enable practitioners to manage the coaching relationship, what has not been studied explicitly is how practitioners foster client relationships in practice. Substantiated by Transformational Learning Theory's supposition that this ability is determined by the practitioner's 'meaning making', this study aimed to address a gap in the research by exploring how coaches make sense of the coaching relationship concept.

Methodology

Q-methodology, developed by William Stevenson in 1935 as a means of gaining access to subjective points of view (Watts and Stenner, 2012) explores a range of opinions working on the assumption that we can categorise people's viewpoint (Stenner et al., 2003). This approach was chosen because, in addition to reflecting the social constructive nature of the research agenda, it allowed a systematic exploration of the diverse viewpoints of coaches on what was important in fostering the coaching relationship.

Figure 1
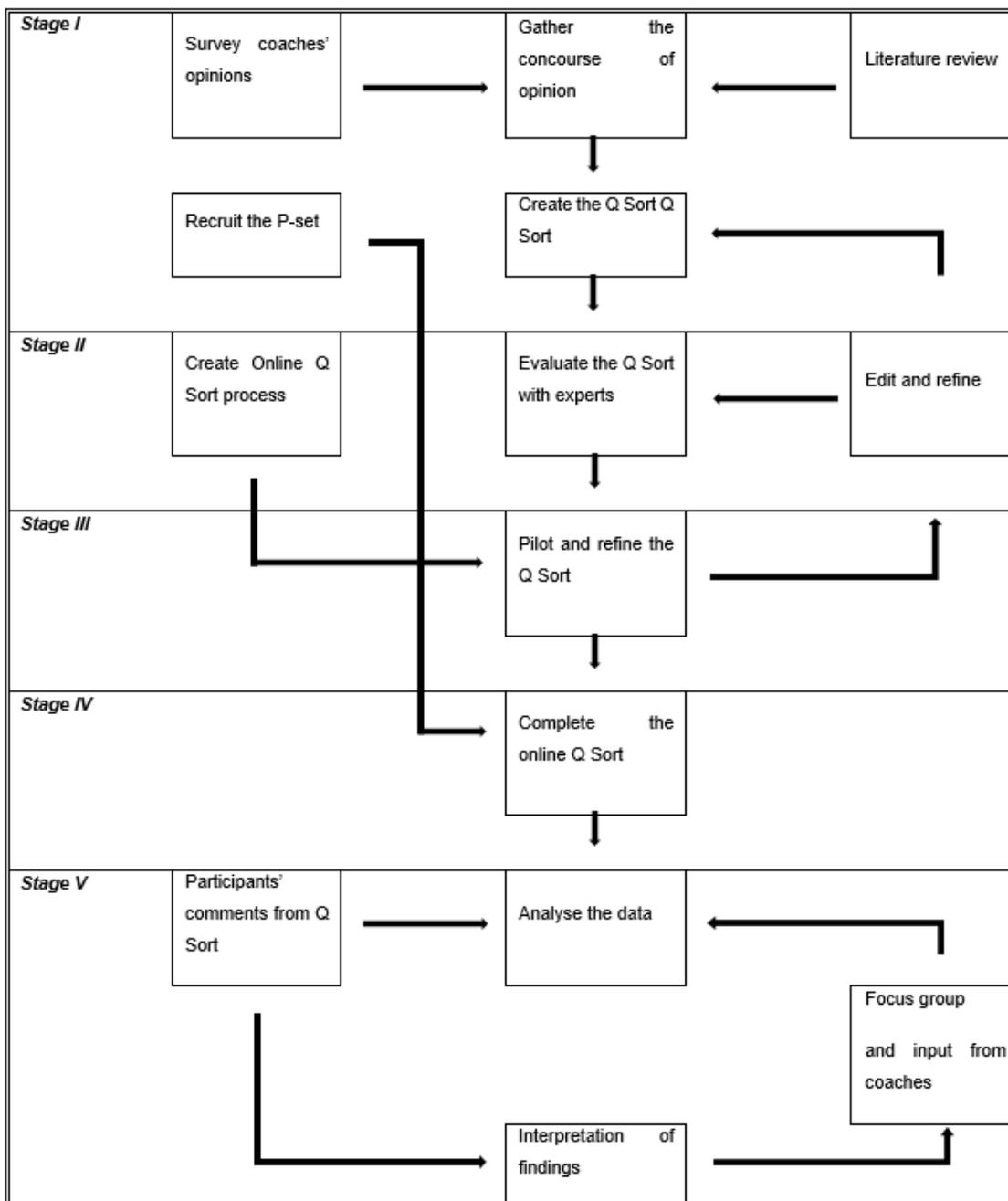
The quantitative aspect of Q methodology - factor analysis data reduction - identified a limited number of patterns that represented a range of viewpoints on the coaching relationship. The resulting qualitative exploration of these different patterns offered a way of enhancing the understanding of the 'meaning making' that underpins a coach's ability to manage the relationship in practice.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the research process which adhered to the University's Code of Practice Ethical Standards for Research involving Human Participants.

The Q-sort statements needed to reflect the concourse of opinion. Several resources were drawn on, in addition to the literature review to ensure that they reflected the wide-ranging characteristics of the coaching relationship. These included a survey of 25 practitioners' thoughts on what, for them, was most important in fostering the coaching relationship; the professional coaching bodies' competency frameworks; the Working Alliance Inventory (Munder et al., 2010) and the coaching process Q-set (Bachkirova et al., 2015).

Table I: The Q-Set Items

Item	Statement	Item	Statement
1	be concerned about my client's welfare	31	focus on the here and now
2	meet face to face rather than virtually (Skype, Zoom, Etc.)	32	give feedback on how I experience my client
3	fully explore my client's thinking (their assumptions, beliefs, stories)	33	be clear that we are equally responsible for the coaching relationship
4	use self-disclosure	34	offer reassurance
5	manage time effectively	35	prioritise the building of mutual trust above everything else
6	be seen as a credible professional	36	be liked by my client
7	be highly empathetic	37	worry about my performance as a coach
8	ensure my client has 'homework' between sessions	38	create a sense of ease throughout the session
9	have my client's respect	39	push my client to achieve their goal
10	take action straightaway if my client appears disengaged	40	have total belief in my client's potential
11	act on my intuition	41	explain the reasoning behind using a specific intervention
12	discuss boundaries and ethical issues	42	explore fully what my client wants from the session
13	be honest whatever the cost	43	keep my client on their agenda
14	have a developmental (learning) outcome	44	be prepared to cause my client to feel uncomfortable
15	be helpful	45	Give advice when my client does not know what to do
16	demonstrate a deep understanding of my client	46	ask my client to give me feedback
17	be physically attractive	47	offer my views and opinions
18	like my client as a person	48	discuss our relationship
19	offer challenge	49	consider my client's organisation as my first priority
20	encourage my client to explore their feelings and emotions	50	have confidence in the inherent value of my coaching
21	admit my mistakes whatever the consequence	51	focused, active listening
22	be aware of my impact on my client	52	share my knowledge about the topic
23	mutually agree on what it is important to work on (i.e. their goals)	53	offer hope
24	have fun	54	be able to coach any type of client
25	come across as being confident	55	get beyond the presenting issue
26	respond spontaneously to what arises in the moment	56	ask thought provoking questions
27	use a coaching model (GROW, OSKAR etc)	57	interrupt when my client 'waffles'
28	dress appropriately	58	share my own feelings of fallibility
29	take an unpopular stance rather than compromise my principles	59	discuss how success will be measured
30	be non-judgmental whatever my client says or does	60	have prepared worksheets for the coaching session

Q-methodology does not require a large group of randomly generated participants, but it is essential to have participants whose viewpoints mattered and were relevant (Stenner and Watts,

2012). This informed recruiting the 'P-Set', 80 practitioners who had a minimum of one year's employment as an internal or external coach in UK organisations.

Table II: Demographics of P-Set

	Male	Female	Internal	External	>7 yrs.	>10 yrs.	> 750 coaching hrs.
Number	19	60	25	54	39	35	38
% of Group	24%	76%	32%	68%	49%	44%	48%

The online Q-sort process used software programme QsorTouch, licensed by York University. Participants were asked to complete an initial sort into three categories; most important, moderately important and not important. They then refined their sort across a nine-category continuum, until they felt it represented their point of view.

Table III: The Nine-Category Continuum

Position on scale	Number of items	Descriptor
+4	4	Essential
+3	6	Extremely important
+2	7	Very important
+1	8	Important
0	10	Moderately important
-1	8	Slightly important
-2	7	Low importance
-3	6	Not at all important
-4	4	Unnecessary

Once completed they were directed to the final part of the process which asked two open-ended questions:

- Briefly, how do the statements you have selected for 'essential' reflect your coaching approach?
- Briefly, how do the statements you have selected for 'irrelevant' reflect your coaching approach?

The responses to these questions, discussion of the factors with a small focus group and input from four coaches - each one representing a participant that loaded onto that factor - informed the interpretation of the findings.

Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Q-methodology requires a combination of statistical analysis and qualitative techniques' (Paradice, 2001) to analyse the data. The R Foundation software package Q-method R version 3.5.0 (2018-04-23) was used to carry out a factor analysis by the inter-correlation of the Q-sorts using a varimax rotation.

A four-factor solution maximised the number of factors explained, accounting for 61.4% of the variance while ensuring that a minimum of two sorts loaded onto that factor alone and the Eigen values were > 1. Factor loadings of ± 0.33 or above were significant at the $p<0.01$ level. 35

participants did not load significantly onto any factor. Their Q-sorts had some similarity with more than one factor correlating equally well onto two factors. This may reflect a standard error of measurement or a 'common discourse' about what is important to fostering the coaching relationship.

Table IV: General Characteristics of the Four Factor Solution

Factor	F1	F2	F3	F4
Average reliability coefficient	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Number of loadings Q Sort's	21	10	9	4
Eigenvalues	17.8	13.0	10.3	17.4
% Explained variance	22.6	16.4	13.1	9.3
Composite reliability	0.99	0.98	0.97	0.94
Standard error factor scores	0.11	0.16	0.16	0.24
Number of participants loaded	21	10	9	4

The Factor Arrays

The statement Z-scores from the scores of the Q-items which loaded on to each factor were used to create the factor arrays shown below. The tables indicate how participants sorted the statements across the nine-category continuum. The numerical values in bold across the top of the table indicate the positioning of the Q-items. For example, for factor 1, Q-item 11 was positioned at the far right of the distribution (+4) indicating that participants aligning with this viewpoint most typically assessed it as 'essential' to fostering the coaching relationship. Conversely, Q-item 17 at the far left of the distribution (-4) indicated that participants considered these irrelevant.
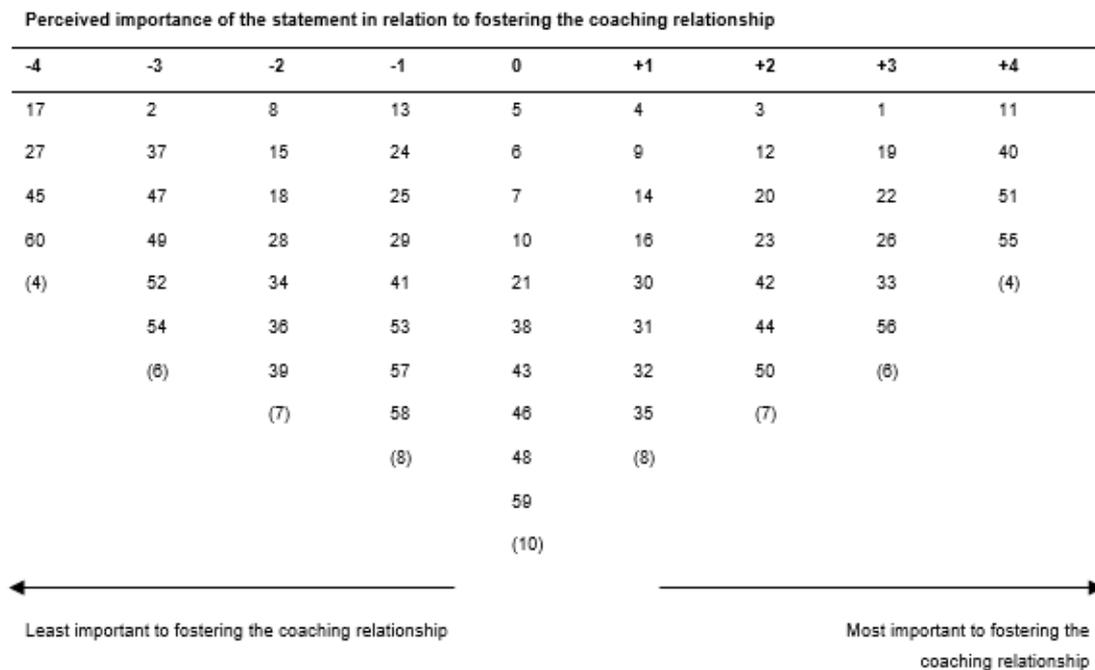
Figure 2: Factor Array Q Sort for Factor 1

Perceived importance of the statement in relation to fostering the coaching relationship

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
17	2	8	13	5	4	3	1	11
27	37	15	24	6	9	12	19	40
45	47	18	25	7	14	20	22	51
60	49	28	29	10	16	23	26	55
(4)	52	34	41	21	30	42	33	(4)
	54	36	53	38	31	44	56	
	(6)	39	57	43	32	50	(6)	
		(7)	58	46	35	(7)		
			(8)	48	(8)			
				59				
				(10)				

Least important to fostering the coaching relationship ← → Most important to fostering the coaching relationship

Figure 3: Factor Array Q Sort for Factor 2

Perceived importance of the statement in relation to fostering the coaching relationship

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
2	8	4	15	11	5	3	1	30
17	37	14	18	21	10	6	9	35
47	45	27	24	23	13	7	12	40
52	49	28	32	25	16	20	38	51
(4)	54	31	46	26	19	22	42	(4)
	60	41	53	29	33	50	56	
	(6)	44	57	34	39	55	(6)	
		(7)	58	36	59	(7)		
			(8)	43	(8)			
				48				
				(10)				

Least important to fostering the coaching relationship   Most important to fostering the coaching relationship

Figure 4: Factor Array Q Sort for Factor 3

Perceived importance of the statement in relation to fostering the coaching relationship

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
17	15	2	32	7	10	5	1	12
18	24	4	33	8	14	6	3	23
36	47	16	37	9	20	21	19	42
52	49	27	38	11	29	22	26	51
(4)	58	34	40	13	31	25	56	(4)
	60	45	44	28	41	30	59	
	(6)	53	54	35	48	43	(6)	
		(7)	57	39	50	(7)		
			(8)	46	(8)			
				55				
				(10)				

Least important to fostering the coaching relationship   Most important to fostering the coaching relationship

Figure 5: Factor Array Q Sort for Factor 4

Perceived importance of the statement in relation to fostering the coaching relationship

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
4	2	10	13	1	5	3	8	7
17	28	12	25	6	16	11	19	20
18	32	21	26	9	22	14	23	42
58	44	29	34	27	38	15	24	51
(4)	47	36	37	30	43	31	40	(4)
	48	52	41	33	45	35	50	
	(6)	57	49	39	46	56	(6)	
		(7)	54	53	50	(7)		
			(8)	55	(8)			
				60				
				(10)				

← Least important to fostering the coaching relationship

Most important to fostering the coaching relationship →

Factor interpretation

In creating a holistic interpretation of each factor, the 'distinguishing statements' provided an insight to understanding how each factor represented a different viewpoint on fostering the coaching relationship (Zabala, 2014). The distinguishing statements help to emphasise the difference in the viewpoints as participants who loaded onto that factor placed it in a position that is significantly different to where other participants on different factors placed it. Table V provides a summary of the distinguishing statements. The ranked scores illustrate the relative positioning. The responses to the open questions for participants loading onto a specific factor provided insight to how a viewpoint may be articulated in practice.

Consensus statements

There were several 'consensus items' which had similar relative positioning on each factor array - see Table VI. These statements related to skills used to build the relationship, listening, questioning and exploring. The concept of a 'common discourse' around elements of the coaching relationship is supported by Bachkirova, Sibley and Myers' research (2015), which elicited a dominant shared viewpoint on the way a coaching session is facilitated. However, the way in which a behaviour, thought or value is expressed may differ depending on the overall perspective of a factor.

Factor Descriptions

The factor descriptors drew on a holistic interpretation of the factor arrays, responses to survey questions and feedback from the focus groups. Figure 6 provides an overview for the rationale for each of the four descriptors.

Table V: Distinguishing Statements

No.	Statement	F1 Ranked Score	F2 Ranked Score	F3 Ranked Score	F4 Ranked Score	Distinguishes
1	be concerned about my client's welfare	+3	+3	+3	0	4*
9	have my client's respect	1	3	0	0	2*
10	take action straightaway if my client appears disengaged	0	1	1	-2	4*
15	be helpful	-2	-1	-3	2	4
16	demonstrate a deep understanding of my client	1	1	-2	1	3
19	offer challenge	3	1	3	3	2*
23	mutually agree on what it is important to work on	2	0	4	3	2*
25	come across as being confident	-1	0	2	-1	3
28	dress appropriately	-2	-2	0	-3	3
30	be non-judgmental whatever my client says or does	1	4	2	0	2*
31	focus on the here and now	1	-2	1	2	2*
33	be clear that we are equally responsible for the coaching relationship	3	1	-1	0	1*
34	offer reassurance	-2	0	-2	-1	2*
35	prioritise the building of mutual trust above everything else	1	4	0	2	2*
37	worry about my performance as a coach	-3	-3	-1	-1	1
39	push my client to achieve their goal	-2	1	0	0	1*
40	have total belief in my client's potential	4	4	-1	3	3
41	explain the reasoning behind using a specific intervention	-1	-2	1	-1	3
48	discuss our relationship	0	0	1	-3	4
52	share my knowledge about the topic	-3	-4	-4	-2	4
53	offer hope	-1	-1	-2	0	3

significant at p=<0.5 *significant p=<0.1

Table VI: Consensus Items with Similar Relative Positioning

No.	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4
3	Fully explore my client's thinking	2	2	3	2
17	Be physically attractive	-4	-4	-4	-4
47	Offer my views and opinions	-3	-4	-3	-3
50	Have confidence in the inherent value of my coaching	2	2	1	1
51	Focused, active listening	4	4	4	4
55	Ask thought provoking questions	3	3	3	2

Figure 6: Overview of Rationale for the Factor Descriptors

	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3	FACTOR 4
Factor Descriptor	**Equality and Exploration**	**Supportively Connecting**	**Pragmatic and Professional**	**Empathic and Consultative**
Quote from participant loading onto the factor	*'It is about reflecting on the here and now of our relationship and how that illuminates the coaching objectives / areas of exploration - reflexivity in the moment'.*	*'The relationship is the most important thing, before process. Once the relationship is in place the process can follow.*	*'My focus is on the issues relevant to my client, and my role is to support them in looking at these afresh, and reflect on how they manifest in their life and work, how they can reassess their importance, and consider how they may be able to change what they do, and/or develop new thinking and new skills'*	*'Coaching should be in a positive, optimistic mind-set, so having fun is essential. As a coach I need to listen and understand from the coachee's perspective. To make it change something, I like to give homework, specific, detailed tasks.*
Style of approach to fostering the coaching relationship	'Increasing Awareness' emphasis on inviting clients to develop a mutually trusting relationship that allows an exploration of what sits under the presenting issue.	'Providing Acceptance' emphasis on the interpersonal connection and creating a mutually accepting relationship in a safe, supportive working environment.	'Facilitating the outcome' who delivers; the emphasis on being seen as a credible professional who ensures the goal is achieved rather than the person to person aspects of relationship building.	'Being Helpful'. Emphasis on building the coaching relationship by providing emotional support and in a structured framework created by the coach.
Higher level of importance than other factors	- be clear that we are equally responsible for the coaching relationship' (33: +3)	- 'be non-judgemental whatever my client has or does' (30: +4) - prioritise the building of mutual trust above everything else (35: +4) - 'have my client's respect' (9: +1) - 'offer challenge' (19: +1) - offer reassurance (34:0)	- Higher level of importance than other factors to: - come across as being confident (25: +2) - dress appropriately (28:0) - explain the reasoning behind using a specific intervention (41: +1)	- share my knowledge about the topic (52: -2)
Most Important to this factor	- get beyond the presenting issue (55: +4) - Focused, active listening (51: +4) - have total belief in my client's potential (40: +4) - act on my intuition (11: +4)	- prioritise the building of mutual trust above everything else (35: +4) - Focused, active listening (51: +4) - have total belief in my client's potential (40: +4) - be non-judgmental whatever my client says or does (30: +4)	- Focused, active listening (51: +4) - explore fully what my client wants from the session (42: +4) - mutually agree on what it is important to work on (i.e. Their goals) (23: +4) - discuss boundaries and ethical issues (12+4)	- Focused, active listening (51: +4) - explore fully what my client wants from the session (42: +4) - encourage my client to explore their feelings and emotions (20: +4) - be highly empathetic (7+4)

Figure 6 continued overleaf

Figure 6 continued

More important to this factor but not differentiating items	- use self-disclosure (4: -1) - get beyond the presenting issue (55: 4) - be prepared to cause my client to feel uncomfortable (44: +2) - give feedback on how I experience my client (32: +1)	- encourage my client to explore their feelings and emotions (38: +3) - be liked by my client (36:0) - create a sense of ease throughout the session (38: +3)	- admit my mistakes whatever the consequence (21: +)2	- Give advice when my client does not know what to do (45: +1)
Lower level importance than other factors	- 'worrying about my performance as a coach' (37: -3) - 'pushing my clients to achieve their goals' (39: -2)	- mutually agreed what is important to work on (23: 0) - focus on the here and now (31: -2)	- have total belief in my client's potential (40: -1) - Offer hope (53: -2) - demonstrate a deep understanding of my client (16: -2)	- be concerned about my client's welfare (1:0) - take action straightaway if my client appears disengaged (10: -2) - discuss our relationship ((48-2)
Least important to this factor	- have prepared worksheets for the coaching session (60: -4) - Give advice when my client does not know what to do (45: -4) - use a coaching model (GROW, OSKAR etc) (27: -4) - be physically attractive (17: -4)	- be physically attractive (17: -4) - share my knowledge about the topic (52: -4) - offer my views and opinions (47: -4) - meet face to face rather than virtually (Skype, Zoom, Etc.) (2: -4)	- be physically attractive (17: -4) - share my knowledge about the topic (52: -4) - be liked by my client (36: -4) - like my client as a person (18: -4)	- be physically attractive (17: -4) - share my own feelings of fallibility (58: -4) - use self-disclosure (4: -4) - like my client as a person (18: -4)
Less important to this factor but not differentiating items	- discuss how success will be measured (59:0) - manage time effectively (5:0) - have prepared worksheets for the coaching session (60: -4)	- have a developmental (learning) outcome (14: -2)	- encourage my client to explore their feelings and emotions (20: +1)	- admit my mistakes whatever the consequence (21: -2)

Factor loadings

Participants only loaded onto a factor if their Q-sort was significantly different from the other patterns of statements shown by the participants who loaded on the other factors' (Coogan, and Herrington, 2011, p. 27).

Table VII summarises the demographic of participants 'loaded' on to the relevant factor.

Table VII: Factor Demographics

Factor	F1	F2	F3	F4
Female	80%	80%	55%	75%
Male	20%	20%	45%	25%
Internal	17%	60%	12%	75%
External	83%	40%	78%	25%
>10 years' experience	71%	10%	67%	Nil

Discussion

Given the diversity of the coaches' backgrounds, their training, approaches and context it was unsurprising to find mixed views expressed by the four factors. The consensus items suggest that all coaches share some similarity in how they make sense of the coaching relationship. All four perspectives gave similar high rankings to the relative importance of active listening, asking incisive questions and exploring their clients. This reflects a consensus in the literature which also views these abilities as important in allowing a coach to establish and develop their relationship with clients (Boyce et al., 2010; Haan, 2008; Cox, 2012).

The influence of the concept of the working alliance was also reflected in the four perspectives. This was to some extent predictable as numerous research studies have previously demonstrated the role of the 'working alliance' in creating effective coaching relationships (Sun et al., 2013; Munder et al., 2010; Gessnitzer and Kauffeld, 2015; Boyatzis et al., 2015; De Haan et al., 2013). What differentiates these perspectives are the aspects of the working alliance that are most important in managing the relationship.

The study suggests that coaches have a preference for either a client-led or process-led approach to building the coaching relationship which echoes the findings of Myers and Bachkirova's study of the coaching process (2018). Their study identified two coaching 'typologies' - a client or process-led approach. The 'Equality and Exploration' and 'Supportively Connecting' perceptions are characterised through a client focused dialogue which helps the coachee to explore their issues reflecting the 'Client-led' approach. In contrast, the 'Pragmatic and Professional' viewpoint places more importance on the process elements, contribution of goals and tasks to relationship building. This aligns with the 'Process-led' approach, where the coach is more active in the use of techniques within a structured process.

Another differentiating feature of the four viewpoints is the type of behaviours coaches considered to be most beneficial in building the relationship. Stein's (2009) exploration of conversational identities in coaching also articulated different behavioural approaches to build the relationship. A characteristic of the 'Empathic and Consultative' viewpoint is the belief in the client's potential and the focus on learning and development. This reflects Stein's Believer identity, as a 'holder of space for the clients to grow and develop into their higher self' (2009, p. 173). The 'Supportively Connecting' and 'Pragmatic and Professional' viewpoints are characterised by a supportive non-judgemental approach with an emphasis on being empathic and creating a safe space where they can support and encourage the client. This typifies Stein's 'Supporter' identity where the practitioner 'sets the tone for the coach client alliance; creates a safe space; relates to client's emotions; shows encouragement; acknowledges the positive; celebrates victories' (2009, p. 173). One of the defining features of the 'Pragmatic and Professional' viewpoint is the emphasis on challenge in the service of enabling the client to achieve their goals. This aligns with Stein's 'Challenger' identity as one who 'raises the bar in terms of expectations for the client's performance and vision' (2009, p. 173).

While the 'Empathic and Consultative' viewpoint reflects the 'Supporter' identity, it does so in a different way to the 'Supportively Connecting' perception. This is best articulated by considering how the four viewpoints reflect Heron's (2001) intervention styles, as they apply to creating the relationship. One of the characteristics of the 'Empathic and Consultative' approach is a greater willingness to provide advice, make suggestions and give information and knowledge, reflecting Heron's Directing and Informing styles. In comparison, the 'Supportively Connecting' view has more of a focus on acknowledging and confidence building as they build the relationship. This is more of an embodiment of Heron's Supporting style. The 'Equality and Exploration' and 'Pragmatic and Professional' views are also differentiated by their preferred intervention style; the 'Equality and Exploration' viewpoint has an emphasis on exploring and increasing insight which reflects Heron's

Discovering style while the 'Pragmatic and Professional' approach with its focus on exploring thinking and assumptions, reflects Heron's Challenger style.

Some authors, for example De Haan (2008), consider that coaching is essentially relational. This reflects one of the defining characteristics of the 'Equality and Exploration' viewpoint; it is about creating 'the real relationship' (Gelso and Carter, 1994) where the coach is authentic, truly themselves and realistic in how they perceive the client. Other authors (Stober and Grant, 2006; Thompson et al., 2008; Palmer and McDowall, 2010; Joseph 2013) consider that the coaching relationship relies on how the coach works with a person-centred approach and 'an attitude of non-direction' (Joseph, 2013, p. 67). The emphasis that the 'Supportively Connecting' view places on a non-directive client-centred stance would appear to epitomise the role of the relationship in a person-centred coaching approach.

In a solution-focused coaching approach, the nature of the relationship has been described as 'professional' (Grant, 2013), with the role of the relationship providing the coach with a vehicle to facilitate a process that enables the client to achieve their outcomes. This typifies how the 'Pragmatic and Professional' viewpoint sees the role of the relationship; necessary but not sufficient to ensuring that clients achieve their desired outcomes.

The way in which the 'Empathic and Consultative' viewpoint interprets the role of the coaching relationship is most akin to the function of the relationship in a coaching approach informed by positive psychology. Through this theoretical lens, the relationship is seen as a 'key ingredient for successful outcomes' (Boniwell et al., 2014, p. 160), and is defined by the way the coach uses various tools to mutually engage with the client (Whitworth, 2007).

Table VIII: Theoretical Concepts: Four Views on the Building the Relationship

| Concept	Equality in Exploration	Supportively Connecting	Pragmatic and Professional	Empathic and Consultative
The Working Alliance	Emphasis on the bond	Emphasis on the bond	Emphasis on goals and task	Emphasis on goals and tasks
Stein's Relational Frame	Believer	Supporter	Challenger	Supporter
Heron's Intervention Style	Discoverer	Supporter	Challenger	Informer
Theoretical Approach	Relational	Person centred	Solution focused	Positive psychology
Role of the Relationship	Coaching is the relationship	The relationship is essential to facilitating the process	The relationship is necessary to facilitating the process	The relationship informs the way in which I work
Coaching Maturity	Systems eclectic	Philosophically based	Process based	Model based

The four viewpoints have some alignment with Clutterbuck and Megginson's model of coaching maturity (2011) which reflects different coaching mind sets. The Empathic and Consultative approach to relationship building is likely to be informed by coaching models with a greater focus on the coaching approach and interventions rather than relational dynamics. The pragmatic and professional viewpoint aligns most closely with the Process Based mind-set as there is a focus on

achieving the desired outcome and while there is a value placed on working collaboratively, a greater importance is given to task and process. Supportively Connecting most closely reflects the philosophically based mind-set as it exemplifies belief in the client's potential and the task element of building a relationship is likely to have a developmental focus. Finally, Equality and Exploration mirrors a systems eclectic mind-set in the coach's lack of reliance on any specific technique or process and willingness to respond to the client in the context of the moment. Table VIII summarises how the four viewpoints on the coaching relationship reflect aspects of the theoretical concepts.

Relationship Styles: A New Perspective on How Coaches Develop the Ability to Foster the Coaching Relationship

The four different viewpoints illustrate different conceptualisations on the ability to foster the coaching relationship. The results of this study suggest four different viewpoints in the way that coaches conceptualise their ability to foster the coaching relationship. This led to proposing a "relationship style framework' illustrated by Figure VI which reflected the range in approach to work with complexity, ambiguity and holistic understanding in building the relationship.

Figure 7: Relationship Styles Framework: How Coaches Foster the Coaching Relationship
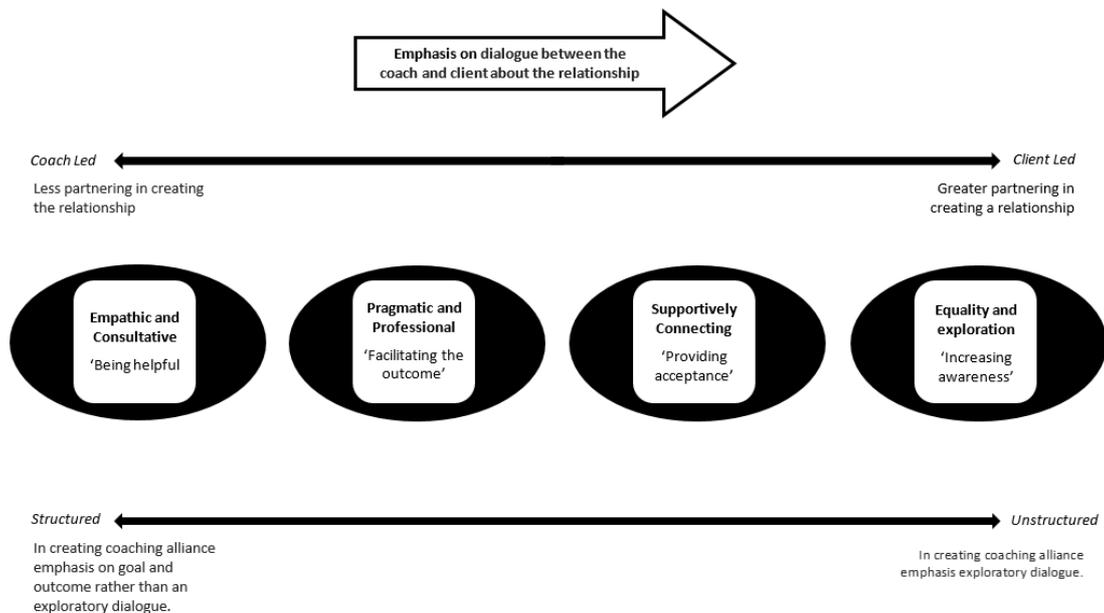
Conclusion

The findings appear to confirm several other studies on the coaching relationship. Firstly, each perspective reflected the concept of the working alliance which saw the three elements - goal, task and bond - playing a role in establishing, maintaining and developing the coaching relationship. The results also supported the conjecture that different coaching genres and approaches vary in the emphasis placed on each of these elements. The 'Professional and Pragmatic' and 'Empathic and Consultative' perspective accentuated the process elements of goal and task. In contrast, the 'Equality in Exploration' and 'Supportively Connecting' stance focused on the interpersonal element, creating the bond.

Secondly, the results offer credence to Stein's (2009) concept of the separate conversational identities in the relational frame. The ranking of what is most important to each of the viewpoints

reflected characteristics which aligned with the Believer, Supporter and Challenger stances. Although the study focused on one aspect of the coaching process - the coaching relationship - one of the defining features of the different stances was the emphasis on a client or process-led approach. This echoed Myers and Bachkirova's study (2018) which identified client- or process-led 'typologies' in the way in which coaching was approached.

The aim in offering a framework of relationship styles which encapsulates the way in which coaches make meaning of their ability to manage the coaching relationship is to encourage coaches to explore their beliefs and assumptions about the way they co create the coaching relationship with clients. This can help coaches answer the question 'is the way I create the coaching relationship with my client is fit for purpose? It can also invite a consideration and curiosity of how we make meaning of relationships in the wider context of our lives, allowing coaches to consider 'who they are being' as well as 'what they are doing' in managing their client relationships.

Limitations

This study failed to explore the dualistic nature of fostering the relationship (Lafrenière et al., 2011; Palmer and McDowall, 2010; Jowett, O'Broin and Palmer, 2010). There was also a focus on the cognitive elements of how coaches made meaning of the coaching relationship and an assumption that learning is a conscious activity, a conjecture which is challenged by several authors (Claxton's, 1997; Boyd and Myers, 1989). Some of the Q-sort statements could be considered to encompass wider elements of the coaching process reflecting a personal bias considering the coaching relationship is not separate to the coaching process.

Future research

Given the diversity of the coaches' approaches, context in which they work (Palmer and Whybrow, 2007) and cultural differences in the way relationships are viewed, there are likely to be more than four viewpoints, and this would warrant further investigation. The observed differences in the demographics between participants loading onto the factors also, for example more internal coaches load on factor 2 and more male factor 3, offer an area of interest for further study.

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