
INTRODUCTION

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON BECOMING A MASTER COACHING PSYCHOLOGIST

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As part of a collaborative effort between the Society of Consulting Psychology (SCP) and the International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP) to gain a better understanding of the place of psychology in the field of coaching and what is required for effectiveness in coaching psychology, this issue of *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* is devoted to “International Perspectives on Becoming a Master Coaching Psychologist.” The issue features articles based on selected presentations made at the International Congress on Coaching Psychology (ICCP) held in San Diego, California, in February 2015. The articles present: (a) a summary of findings from one of the longest-running programs of research about effective coaching psychology processes and outcomes, (b) a report on an empirical study of the practice of coaching psychology that led to the creation of a foundational competency model, (c) a conceptual model for understanding the self of the coach as the primary instrument for coaching with implications for the care and keeping of the self for greater coaching effectiveness, (d) an argument for why coaches need facility with multiple psychological models for understanding their clients and their circumstances, and (e) a call for a paradigm shift for studying the effectiveness of coaching and the development of coaches—from the prevailing reductionistic scientific framework to a more contextual, holistic, and dynamic approach based on modern theory and research concerning the development of human expertise.

Keywords: coaching, coaching psychology, coaching competencies, coaching outcomes, coaching expertise

Editor's Note. This is an introduction to the special issue “International Perspectives on Becoming a Master Coaching Psychologist.” Please see the Table of Contents here: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/cpb/68/2/>.—RBK

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In February 2015 the Society of Consulting Psychology (SCP), with helpful guidance from colleagues in the International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP) and the steering committee of the International Congress of Coaching Psychology (ICCP), hosted the United States' first ICCP in San Diego. There were 240 attendees, with 9 different countries represented: Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States. This gathering of psychologists from around the world who practice and conduct research in coaching psychology was significant in several ways: It was the first step by coaching psychologists and leaders in SCP to begin to fulfill an expressed intention and commitment to join with international colleagues in ISCP and ICCP in order to help advance the practice and science of coaching psychology worldwide; it provided the opportunity for American coaching and consulting psychologists and students to meet, and be exposed to the research and practice of, their international colleagues; it brought together like-minded psychologists from around the world who believe that the discipline of psychology has much to offer to the practice, research, and (especially) clients of coaching; and it raised the visibility of the scholarly and applied work of coaching psychologists from different countries and facilitated rich dialogue and the cross-cultural exchange of perspectives, ideas, and lessons.

This special issue of *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* (CPJ) consists of the write-ups of selected presentations at the first ICCP to be held in the United States.

Background

For the past 20 or so years there has been a significant and growing demand for coaching services worldwide (International Coach Federation, 2013; Sherpa Coaching, 2015) and a parallel proliferation of coaches with a wide range of levels and types of expertise who use a variety of approaches. This multifaceted growth has resulted in a number of issues that need to be better understood and then resolved. For instance, one issue is certification. Many coaches are not certified, while some are certified by free-standing, self-accredited professional organizations with few barriers to entry. This state of affairs grew problematic for coaching psychologists a few years ago when credentials from a certain predominant certification organization were made prerequisite for responding to requests for proposals (RFPs) for leadership coaching in some U.S. government agencies. A number of SCP members ran into similar exclusionary policies at public corporations. That apparent restraint of free trade was resolved in government agencies by actions taken by the American Psychological Association. This situation called attention to the need for coaching psychologists to better communicate what we do, our qualifications, and our distinctive value to clients.

In addition to the issue of certification, the growing demand for coaching services worldwide has raised the fundamental question among psychologists, "Where is psychology in the coaching space?" Having not satisfactorily addressed this question thus far, the field of psychology has been like a sleeping giant. But now it is awake and moving to answer. It's about time. After all, consulting psychologists have been doing the kind of work now called *executive coaching* since at least the 1950s (Kilburg, 2016).

Recognizing the importance of these issues, in 2012 the executive board of SCP created the Coaching Psychology Credentialing Committee (CPCC)¹ to investigate whether there was a need and desire on the part of SCP members for an advanced credential for executive coaching to help them better compete in the marketplace in an area of psychology practice in which they were imminently qualified. If the answer to this question was a resounding "yes," then the second charge of CPCC was to determine how best to satisfy that need.

¹ The members of CPCC were highly experienced coaching psychologists, and they were aided by a group of widely recognized expert executive-coaching psychologists acting as advisors. Members were Judith Blanton (co-chair), Vicki Vandaveer (co-chair), Sandra Foster, Beth Gullette, Johan Naude, and Douglas Riddle. Advisors were Stewart Cooper, Richard Kilburg, Rodney Lowman, Sandra Shullman, and Randall White.

The committee began its work by scanning the professional environment to see what was already out there for psychologists. This was a worldwide task, and it led to the discovery that indeed many psychologists around the globe were struggling with the same issues, and many in a good number of countries had a head start on the United States in addressing them.

In brief, the committee learned that the ISCP had been formed in 2006² to encourage the development of theory, research, and practice in coaching psychology. Also, in 2010 representatives of the British Psychological Society's Special Group on Coaching Psychology and the Australian Psychological Society's Interest Group in Coaching Psychology launched an international steering group in order to have ongoing international-congress events sponsored by regional professional-psychology or coaching-psychology bodies. The CPCC learned that there were member coaching-psychology groups from 12 different countries involved with the ICCP steering group. SCP soon formed a formal partnership with ISCP by signing a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate with the international community in further advancing the science and practice of coaching psychology worldwide.

Member countries of the ICCP (see <http://www.coachingpsychologycongress.org/>) and ISCP (see <http://www.isfcp.net/>) host several different ICCPs each year. And while coaching psychologists in the United States had been asking, "Where is psychology in the coaching space?" the international coaching psychology community had been asking, "Where is the United States in ISCP?" A single answer to these two questions emerged and gave impetus to the first ICCP to be held in the United States. We are pleased to share some of the highlights from that congress.

Overview of the Special Issue

This collection of articles should primarily be of value as a guide to developing one's competence, skill, and mastery as a coaching psychologist. There is a progressive flow, as the articles proceed from a general discussion of the effectiveness and efficacy of coaching to an increasingly specific set of articles focused on the development of coaching competence and skill. The special issue concludes with an expansive vision of the future, a potentially frame-breaking vision suggesting a new paradigm for guiding coaching psychology into a new era of practice and research by reconceptualizing the field from the perspective of the development of deep expertise.

The first article is by Anthony Grant, director of the Coaching Psychology Unit (CPU) at the University of Sydney in Australia and an important pioneering contributor to the scientific understanding of how and how well coaching psychology works. His paper (Grant, 2016) reports findings from CPU's 17-year program of empirical research, largely using randomized controlled outcomes studies, in four areas: (a) the elaboration of a practical theoretical framework by testing a "solutions-focused, cognitive-behavioral" model for coaching psychology; (b) the effectiveness of both professional and peer coaching; (c) the nature of an effective coach-coachee relationship; and (d) consideration of how coaching psychology can contribute to the broader psychological enterprise. Taken together, the studies indicate that coaching is related to increased resilience, well-being, workplace engagement, stress management, self-efficacy, and goal attainment. Further, the studies point to the centrality of the coach-coachee relationship in accounting for these outcomes. The paper is impressive for the large number of empirical studies it summarizes, which represents perhaps the longest-standing program of research on the effectiveness of coaching psychology. In addition to highlighting the key implications for the effective practice of coaching, Grant also notes methodological questions arising from some conflicting findings that suggest issues to be worked out in future coaching-outcomes research.

² At the 1st International Coaching Psychology Conference, in London, United Kingdom, held on 18 December 2006, 20 conference delegates from around the world convened a meeting and supported the idea of setting up a forum for coaching psychology. They realized that in 2006 there were international associations for coaching, but there were none specifically for the developing field of coaching psychology. The delegates agreed to launch the International Forum for Coaching Psychology. Based on the forum's success, in April 2008 the Society for Coaching Psychology was launched, and on 18 July 2011 the society's name was officially changed to the ISCP.

The second article, by Vandaveer, Lowman, Pearlman, and Brannick (2016), presents the results of a professional-practice analysis of executive/leader development coaching by psychologists. This study was a collaborative effort between the SCP and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP). Its purposes were: (a) to begin to systematically identify the domains of knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics (KSAPs) important for coaching by psychologists, and (b) to develop a foundational competency model to guide psychologists wishing to prepare for executive/leader coaching and to inform graduate psychology programs that train students. Twenty-seven psychologists who are widely recognized as subject-matter experts (SMEs) in coaching were interviewed in depth on a range of topics related to effective coaching, including theoretical frameworks, coaching process, KSAPs they regard as most critical, and factors associated with coaching “success” and “failure.” Results of the SME interviews were used to design and develop a practice analysis survey that was then administered online to members of SCP and SIOP who identified themselves as psychologists who do coaching. The survey results were then reviewed by SMEs, and consensus decisions were made about areas of disagreement in order to better clarify and finalize the foundational competency model. Results of the interviews and the survey are reported, and an overview of the foundational competency model is presented.

The third article is by Tatiana Bachkirova, a Health and Care Professions Council registered occupational psychologist and a reader in Coaching Psychology at Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom. Her research over the past 16-plus years has focused on human development, including developmental coaching. Her article (Bachkirova, 2016) takes an important next step toward understanding what it takes to be an effective coach, beyond consideration of foundational competencies (KSAPs). Bachkirova’s work shows that while KSAPs are important, the application of them is not a straightforward, technical matter given the complexity, uncertainty, instability, and uniqueness of professional work. Each coach represents a constellation of various competences at different stages of mastery situated within the totality of one’s being, and much of the artistry of coaching psychology depends on how each coach is able to use these capabilities. Drawing from research, including research from the CPU summarized in Grant’s lead article, showing the coach’s relationship with the client to be a central contributing factor to the effectiveness of coaching psychology, Bachkirova’s article considers what the coach brings to that relationship by focusing on the coach as a primary instrument of change. She concludes that “the way we are as individuals intertwines with our professional knowledge and skills” and that development of coaching practitioners should “aim for congruence between who they are as individuals and their professional approaches and styles, seeking to achieve a unique fit with each client.” Developing the self as instrument, then, involves (a) understanding one’s self—including the “competent” self (consistent with the belief that the coach’s KSAPs are key to effectiveness) and the “dialogic” self (consistent with seeing coaching as joint “meaning making” between the coach and coachee); (b) taking care of one’s self; and (c) regularly checking the quality of one’s self. Bachkirova provides concrete examples and suggestions for knowing, caring for, and ensuring the quality of the self.

In the fourth article, Carol Kauffman, founder of Harvard’s Institute of Coaching, and William Hodgetts, vice president of Enterprise Coaching and Assessment at Fidelity Investments in Boston, Massachusetts, make a compelling case for the importance of coaches being skilled in the use of multiple psychological models in their executive/leader coaching work (Kauffman & Hodgetts, 2016). Using an annotated transcript of an actual coaching engagement, the authors demonstrate how the use of four different models—cognitive-behavioral, psychoanalytic, positive psychology, and adult development—can frame the coaching engagement and provide complementary perspectives for understanding the client and the situation. Their case study illustrates how multiple perspectives contribute to the design of interventions that have greater likelihood of effectiveness in achieving coaching goals. Like Bachkirova, Kauffman and Hodgetts refer to the complex environment that leaders face and conclude that coaching psychologists must be agile and well equipped to be effective in such a dynamic, fluid, and ever-shifting context. Model agility is seen as an important aspect of a coach’s expertise and repertoire of interventions, as different needs and situations are often best served by different models and sometimes multiple models add a depth to comprehending a particular, complex situation. The authors further advise that in pursuing model agility, “the goal

is to develop the capacity to hold our hypotheses lightly and not prematurely commit to a particular explanation or point of view,” instead seeking to “follow the client and to be as open to his or her world as possible, allowing your models to inform but not control you.” This notion converges with Bachkirova’s view of the coach as a key instrument in coaching. The article includes a useful appendix that contains possible approaches and sample questions for each of the four psychological models discussed.

The final article is by Richard Kilburg, a preeminent coaching and consulting-psychology scholar, practitioner, thought leader, and educator in the United States. Kilburg’s (2016) piece is a pivot from the four preceding articles, which can all be understood from the frame of reference of existing models of coaching psychology. Kilburg attempts to reorient the field by proposing that the prevailing research paradigm of randomized controlled trials may well have reached a point of diminishing returns for understanding effectiveness in coaching psychology. He suggests that there are other ways to learn about what makes for effective coaching practice. In other words, what Kilburg is proposing is that we may have nearly “exhausted the current paradigm” per Thomas Kuhn’s (1970) treatise on paradigm shifts. In addition to acknowledging the difficulties of valid and unbiased measurement of coaching outcomes in randomized controlled trials, Kilburg argues that the behaviors of leaders within their particular contexts—which are increasingly complex, dynamic, and unique—are too varied and dissimilar from each other for conventional research designs and methods to answer some of the more pressing questions that remain about coaching. He suggests that a more appropriate and practical paradigm for advancing the practice and science of coaching and consulting psychology, as well as the professional development of coaching psychologists, is expertise-based, where levels of mastery are identified and studied across a developmental continuum from novice, apprentice, journey person, expert, to master. In brief, early stages are more focused on technical issues and the development of declarative knowledge, whereas later stages are increasingly focused on the procedural and tacit knowledge needed to artfully apply a body of skills in a shifting, unpredictable context. Kilburg summarizes the history of coaching and consulting in psychology, plus a well-developed paradigm for studying human expertise, and he provides examples to demonstrate how different approaches to coaching can be studied and practiced within that framework.

Conclusion

The five articles in this special issue contribute to a growing body of knowledge about what it takes to practice coaching psychology to help clients achieve certain desired outcomes. There is plenty for coaches, especially those who practice from a psychological perspective, to consider as they build, improve, and refine their professional skill. But the trajectory of the articles, culminating in Kilburg’s vision for the future, highlights not only additional things to learn but also suggests a new paradigm for *how* we know and learn.

All of the authors in this special issue acknowledge the complexity of coaching clients who operate within a dynamic, fluid, and fast-changing environment; therefore, adequately understanding effective coaching processes may indeed require a paradigm capable of accommodating the simultaneous interplay of several factors that probably overdetermine the effects of coaching. In addition to a new paradigm for conceptualization, we also need to expand our operational definition for measuring effective coaching. Objective measures of outcomes and a comparison of perceptions across a range of key stakeholders are needed to develop a more holistic and systemic understanding of impact.

Each of these papers puts forth a different approach to developing a coach’s capacity to deal with the complexities of this work. Grant and his colleagues at CPU have worked to orient the client and coach around a solutions-focused, cognitive-behavioral approach to achieving certain outcomes. Vandaveer et al. provide a foundational competency model, the essential elements of professional competence for a coaching psychologist. Bachkirova goes beyond this reductionistic “science” of coaching by delving into the “art” of coaching. Her focus on the self urges coaching psychologists to continually tune their “instrument” to harmonize with dynamic and shifting client

relationships and needs. Kauffman and Hodgetts demonstrate the practical utility of facility with several different psychological models, pointing the way to another avenue for the continued professional development of coaching psychologists.

Each author in this special issue acknowledges the complexity of this professional practice and hints at some of the difficulties with the prevailing scientific paradigm. Perhaps we should be getting on with work to clarify what constitutes different levels of proficiency for coaching psychologists and, using the expertise paradigm, identify the pathways to mastery as Kilburg advocates.

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Received April 7, 2016

Accepted April 7, 2016 ■