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individual coaching & coaching development

## Currents in Coaching Research Newsletter

### Studying the Process of Coaching

A recent review of coaching literature shows that there are a growing number of empirical studies of coaching outcomes, application of specific methods and models of coaching and coach and client characteristics. However, there are few studies of the coaching process itself. The documented events of coaching engagements which engender successful outcome remain something of a mystery. Siegfried Greif's study<sup>[1]</sup> grew out of his interest in applying a process-theory of coaching to test seven hypothetical success factors observable in coaching behaviors.

Greif bases the formulation of the study on research practices in psychotherapy which has a long tradition of analyzing recorded sessions. The article notes, for example, that Carl Rogers' emphasis on the importance of a warm and empathetic relationship between therapist and client derives in part from evidence found in recorded psychotherapy sessions.

The article also offers a brief overview of the literature supporting the development of process theory in therapy and the observable principles of five success factors in psychotherapy: the therapeutic bond; problem actualization; resource activation; motivational clarification and mastery. Of these, resource activation is expected to show the strongest effect, with the therapeutic bond as a basic principle underpinning all forms of therapy. Greif also provides an overview of the literature on resource activation.

#### **Five Essential Elements**

Applying these principles to our field of practice, Greif proposes a process theory of coaching which seeks to integrate "concepts, assumptions and interventions of different schools and (which) embraces general success factors" (p. 99). He outlines five essential elements of the theory. The first of these defines coaching as "an intensive and systematic facilitation of result-oriented problem

### In This Issue

[Studying the Process of Coaching](#)

[Researcher's Haiku](#)

[References](#)

### Researcher's Haiku

*The Stars are there not  
to remind us but to let  
us know what this is*

*Sid Corman (The Unswept Path:  
Contemporary American Haiku)*

*(Readers are invited to email their  
researcher's haiku-original or otherwise-for  
inclusion in future issues. Your feedback on  
this issue is welcome too!)*

### References

- <sup>[1]</sup> Siegfried Greif. (2010) A new frontier of research and practice: Observation of coaching behavior. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 6 (2) December 2010 , 97-105

reflection and self-reflection ". (p.100). The core concepts of coaching are facilitating result-oriented self-reflection, self-change and self-development. The basic process of activating self-reflection rests on stimulating objective self-awareness. Different intervention strategies are applied based on assumptions of client motivation and personality. The fifth principle specifies that "general, specific and even unique preconditions, success factors and interactions in the coaching process and outcome are differentiated to obtain a comprehensive description of relevant factors and process of coaching" (p.100)

### ***The Seven Success Factors***

Grief's seven success factors are observable coaching behaviors. The first is demonstrating, through verbal and non-verbal behaviors, a feeling of esteem and emotional support for the client. The second success factor involves inviting the client to analyze his or her own problems, consider consequences and create a results-oriented statement of a problem that includes the undesired state, a desired state and an unknown means of reaching the goal. The third success factor puts the focus on facilitating client self-reflection. This includes reflection on values, strengths, interests, abilities, competencies, emotional reactions, weaknesses, habitual behaviors and comparison of ideal and real self-concepts. Grief emphasizes the distinction between allowing the client to engage in unfocused self-reflection and rumination and the critical factor of facilitating reflection which is intensively results oriented. The fourth success factor is defined as affect reflection and calibration. By this, Greif means activating, re-experiencing and changing emotions in coaching sessions. It is the coach's job to help the client understand the consequences of emotional experiences and, as appropriate, facilitate a shift to positive and motivating emotions. The fifth success factor is goal clarification, assisting clients to articulate goals which include concrete definitions and explanations of the client's goals and intentions within social and organizational contexts. Such goals often evolve over the course of a series of coaching sessions, thus requiring on-going goal refinement as an element of the coaching process. Resource activation is the sixth goal and encompasses activating both the client's internal resources (strengths, motivations, skills) and external resources (support systems, expert knowledge and others). Finally, successful coaching behaviors support the client to transfer analysis and reflection into action with specific processes to reflect on and learn from experiences.

### ***Conclusion***

Grief and his colleagues developed an observation instrument for coaching behaviors and used it in a pilot study rating coaching behaviors in forty-four recorded sessions. A summary of the results is provided in the article with reference to a more detailed resource in the reference session. Among the findings, Greif notes that nonverbal reinforcement correlates with gains on emotional insight; verbal empathy correlates with the client's behavior reflection, goal reflection and goal-attainment satisfaction. Facilitating self-reflection is linked to reducing helplessness. Resource activation correlates with goal satisfaction and supporting transfer predicts gains in effective time management and information management. The author also notes some contradictory findings and explores possible

explanations.

The article concludes with observations about areas for future research. While the reference list is extensive, it should be noted that several of the resources are in German.

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