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## Currents in Coaching Research Newsletter

### Survival of the Fittest Fit

The literature review in this article underscores the attention given to the coach-client relationship in recent studies. The authors cite, for example, a 2008 study by the American Management Association which documented the degree to which ineffective coaching relationships correlate with termination of the coaching assignment. Drawing on conceptual articles on match characteristics from coaching, psychotherapy and mentoring, Boyce et al. construct a framework for matching coach and client on input and processes. In this model, the factors in

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## Researcher's Haiku

**TV off  
the screen reflects  
a living room.**

by: Penny Harter  
in *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!)*

effective matches include commonality, compatibility and credibility.

***Factors in Effective Matches:  
Commonality, Compatibility,  
Credibility***

Commonality refers to characteristics or experiences shared by the coach and client. These may include demographic attributes (such as gender, age, race); professional attributes (such as education and professional training); and personal attributes such as shared hobbies, volunteer activities, religious beliefs. Compatibility refers to the "combination of client and coach behavioral preferences or characteristics...that influence cognitions and behaviors in various situations" (p.916). These may include personality traits, learning or leadership styles. Credibility refers to the coach's characteristics including training, experience, coaching competence, which inform the client's willingness to trust the coach and have confidence in the process.

***Rapport, Trust and Commitment***

The authors' conceptual model also included three aspects of coaching process: rapport, trust and commitment. Rapport is described as "reducing differences between coach and client", mutual understanding and liking, "coordination, mutual attentiveness and positivity"(p.917). Establishing and maintaining trust is believed to "support a client's willingness to be open and vulnerable and allows the coach to be supportive, non-judgmental and challenging" (p.917). Commitment is characterized by social and emotional behaviors on the part of both coach and client which demonstrate a dedication to doing what is required to fulfill relationship responsibilities.

Using the conceptual model, the authors formulated five hypotheses. In summary,

## ***References***

- [1] Building successful leadership coaching relationships: Examining the impact of matching criteria in a leadership coaching program. Lisa A. Boyce, R. Jeffrey Jackson and Laura J. Neal. Journal of Management Development. 29 (10), 2010.

they hypothesized: coach-client pairs who were systematically matched would evaluate coaching outcomes more positively than control pairs; specific relationship processes would predict coaching outcomes; relationship processes would mediate match commonality and compatibility; and relationship processes would mediate coach credibility and impact on coaching outcomes.

### ***Facts of the Study***

The setting for the study was a US military academy, and the authors note in their discussion of limitations, that this may limit the generalizability of the findings. One hundred forty-five cadets and 85 senior leader coaches participated in the survey. Participating coaches and clients were paired either randomly or systematically matched based on scores for commonality, compatibility and credibility. At the end of the program, coaches and clients completed surveys which measured their perceptions of the coach-client relationship and outcomes. In the application process, participants completed assessments identifying measures of commonality (on factors such as gender, ethnicity, academic major and hobbies/interests). To assess compatibility, coaches completed a standardized Leadership Questionnaire and clients completed a standardized learning style questionnaire. The application also included a survey identifying perceived coach needs or ability to coach in order to match on credibility. Military experience was considered similar to business acumen and measures of compatibility were applied as well using this factor. The end of engagement survey measured rapport, trust and commitment. The outcomes evaluation used a 7 point Likert scale to

assess satisfaction with the experience, usefulness of the experience, performance changes and organizational outcomes.

While the results did not show a statistically significant difference in coaching outcomes between systematically matched and randomly assigned pairs, the data did demonstrate that relationship processes predicted coaching outcomes. Specifically, coach-client rapport and trust predict client reactions while commitment predicts leadership performance. Trust predicted program outcomes for clients and coaches.

### **Conclusion**

In their concluding discussion, the authors note that their study contributes to understanding the practical limitations of systematic matching and offers "empirical support for the impact of the coach-client relationship on coaching outcomes" (p.925). Specifically, the coach-client relationship has an impact on the credibility of the coach which, in turn, is crucial in achieving outcomes. Recognizing that specific factors have specific impact, the authors affirm that both rapport and trust significantly predict satisfaction and usefulness and that commitment predicts leadership performance improvement. Strong rapport correlates with positive client reactions to the coaching experience; commitment correlates with behavioral outcomes. Complementary, rather than similar, managerial and learning styles support compatible relationships. While noting practical considerations in the coach-client matching process in organizations, the authors affirm the impact of a good fit on coaching outcomes.

The article by Boyce et al. may be of particular interest to individuals who are

seeking to build organizational coaching programs and are considering critical factors in setting up coach-client relationships to enhance the likelihood of success.

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[1] Building successful leadership coaching relationships: Examining the impact of matching criteria in a leadership coaching program. Lisa A. Boyce, R. Jeffrey Jackson and Laura J. Neal. Journal of Management Development. 29 (10), 2010.

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