

Executive Coaching: An Exploration of the What, How and Who of Coaching Practices from a Cognitive-Emotional and Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract

Executive coaching, as part of leadership development programs, has gained significant momentum despite scarce empirical evidence on its impact and key factors. The overarching objective of this doctoral dissertation is providing a novel contribution to the understanding of how coaching processes work by examining three differentiate yet complementary core dimensions (what, how, and who of coaching practices), using a mixed-methods approach. By systematically analyzing how is built the coaching connection, we provide robust insights on how the ‘magic’ of coaching works, what coaches essentially do and could do better, and how clients perceive processes and indeed respond to coaching interactions.

A premise

My research interests have long lied on adult development processes –understood as change processes, and the specific key factors which might help boosting those processes on people and organizations. Albeit the research on change and development seems to harp on the importance of others in the process itself, the actual process of development and the role of the ‘helper’ (e.g., mentor, coach, or others) are often treated like mysterious ‘black boxes’.

Concretely coaching, as a person-centered approach that supports personalized and challenging learning, holds the potential for positive, transformative outcomes; it provides a perspective on learning as a personal engagement with change. Certainly, the practice of coaching has been around for millennia in the form of individualized professional advice yet has only recently been formally recognized as a psychological construct within the corporate and academic arenas. Thus, its fast spread poses a unique challenge to the field of management research since it represents a new configuration of behavior in both organizations and managerial education. The obvious risk of this intense growth is that the field ends up in chaos, lacks transparency, drops in the quality of services, and hence, might become a short-lived organizational fad that passes quickly (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh & Parker, 2010).

Theoretical Background

Coaching has usually been viewed as a way to ‘correct’ poor performance and to link individual effectiveness with organizational performance. We contend that to stimulate stronger performance in a sustainable way is only possible when primarily focusing on the client’s strengths, aspirations, and personal development.

Though several theoretical attempts have been made in the literature to classify the existing coaching schools, none of these approaches has been empirically validated (Segers, Vloeberghs, Henderickx, & Inceoglu, 2011). In short, the results of the most prominent coaching outcomes studies report that executive coaching in an organizational setting is significantly linked to individual performance and commitment (Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas & Kucine, 2003), self-efficacy, leader effectiveness and work satisfaction (Baron & Morin, 2007).

The fact that coaching has become part of leadership development programs has prompted studies that try to justify the use of coaching techniques to increase self-awareness through consciousness-raising experiences (Mirvis, 2008), boost reflective practices by managers enhancing decision-making processes within MBA programs (De Déa Roglio & Light, 2009), accelerate career development (Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008), and improve performance by supplementing coaching with multisource feedback (Hooijberg & Lane, 2009). Yet few have examined the process of executive coaching in depth through a multidimensional rigorous perspective.

Simultaneously, the accreditation of coaches is still controversial; most coaches practicing today do not use theoretically coherent approaches and scientifically-validated techniques and measures. Much of the coach training industry appears to have been driven by a need for credibility and status and a demand for ‘accreditation’. While competency modeling distinguishes top performers from average performers in any field, executive coaching competency models do not explicitly cite related supporting empirical research; do not provide conceptual clarity on cultural competence in coach education, nor state the procedures employed in developing competency models (Mosteo, Maltbia, & Marsick, 2014). In fact, the need to take *cultural sensibility* into account turns evident when considering a co-constructed process such as coaching: a coach’s own cultural lens impacts his/her coaching practice, while also the competency model to which one adheres to is impacting his/her coaching interactions in the way it is defined and implemented, considering the cultural nuances that might be embedded on the competency model itself.

Thus, practitioner and academic communities have called for coaches to enhance cultural awareness skills (Plaister-Ten, 2009). It is therefore evident we cannot, for instance, raise the quality of the training of coaches or improve the selection process of professional coaches used in leadership development programs if we are not confident on the specific characteristics of the industry and the critical elements that need to be incorporated in the coaching process to maximize its success (Maltbia, Marsick, & Ghosh, 2014). From our work, we go a step further by recalling credentialing associations to examine the level of cultural sensitivity embedded in their competency models as a first step in building more culturally sensitive capabilities in coaches around the world.

Comprehensiveness of the research studies that built up the thesis

Still, current research on coaching seems to be primarily occupied by the question, ‘*Does it work?*’ This is reasonable since evidence of effective outcomes is critical for establishing legitimacy. Yet, ‘*How do coaches help clients make meaningful and lasting change in their lives?*’ This question is central for coaching practice, and becomes particularly relevant to high-engagement coaching relationships that involve a holistic, developmental approach to enhancing leadership capability. To the best of our knowledge, no research project has yet focused on the entire three core dimensions that constitute what has been referred as to the *coaching cube*¹: (1)

¹ The *Coaching Cube* is an internationally recognize theoretical framework which has recently helped to structure and understand the coaching industry. This dissertation uses it as an overall umbrella that on the one side helps on guiding the diverse research studies encompassed, while goes further by adding elements that enhance the complexity of the referred cube model. See:

coaching agendas (*what*); (2) coaching approaches (*how*); (3) coaches' competencies (*who*). Explicitly, we posit that understanding coaching as a specific form of lifelong human development in both organizational and managerial educational contexts, is a function of examining its (a) *content* (or the 'what' going beyond coaching agendas, in terms of *value perception from the coachee's perspective* as the main recipient of the process) —considered as a research phenomenon; (b) *context* (or 'how' coaching is deployed through specific approaches while engaging the coachee) —grounded in the philosophical orientation of constructivism; and finally (c) *conduct* (or 'who' can act as a coach, the builder of the coaching space, using specific core competencies) —grounded in the philosophical substrate of behaviorism. As such, the continuum of an executive coaching process encompasses all elements bearing on the science of human performance —*content, context, and conduct*. Hence, the overarching research questions on which this thesis is built are:

1. Which are the crucial components that might moderate the coachee's value perception of an executive coaching process? (*What*)
2. Which is the impact of coaching and what might be the moderators of the coaching process outcomes? (*How*)
3. What are the key core coaching competencies and how might culture be embedded in the most widely-used set of coaching competencies? (*Who*)

Despite the main body of my thesis provides with detailed answers to these three fundamental questions, in this summary I provide the reader with initial answers in order to theoretically position my doctoral dissertation and to anticipate the main empirical results. In the *Conclusions*, I will provide an overview of the main contributions of the thesis.

This doctoral dissertation is articulated in several chapters, three of them corresponding to the main empirical studies developed in form of papers. A visual depiction of them is as follows:

Main Empirical Heritage

Empirical study	Main research questions	Main theoretical frameworks	Empirical approaches/ research designs	Samples	Key findings
Study 1: <i>An Integrative Framework on Executive Coaching Perceived Value from the Coachee's Side</i>	-What are the crucial factors that might be moderating executive's value perception of an executive coaching process? -To what extent might those moderators depend on the coach's or coachee's side?	High Quality Relationships (Boyatzis, Smith, & Beveridge, 2012; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Gregory & Leavy, 2010); Coaching Relationship (Baron & Morin, 2009; De Haan, Duckworth, Birch & Jones, 2013)	Literature review; Interrater reliability through Thematic Analysis of a consistent sample of Interviews	197 Bank Branches Executives	Perception of coaching value is contingent on a set of at least 4 moderators which not only depend on the coach but also on the coachee (<i>Coach's Reliability & Guidance, Executive's Self-Awareness & Willingness</i>)

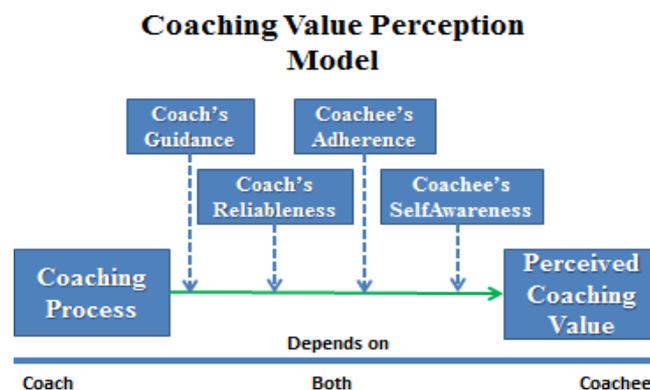
“Structuring and Understanding the Coaching Industry: The Coaching Cube” (Segers, Vloeberghs, Henderickx & Inceoglu, 2011). *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 10(2), 204-221.

<p>Study 2: <i>Understanding Cognitive-Emotional Processing through a Coaching Process: the Influence of Coaching on Vision, Goal-directed Energy, and Resilience</i></p>	<p>-To what extent might an ICT-based coaching process affect ideal-self, goal-directed energy, and resilience? -Are there moderators of the ICT-based coaching impact?</p>	<p>Intentional Change Theory (ICT; Boyatzis, 2001, 2006, 2008); Positive and Negative Emotional Attractors (PEA/NEA) (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006; Howard, 2006; Boyatzis, Smith & Beveridge, 2012).</p>	<p>Quantitative: Within-subjects pre-post design non-equivalent dependent variables (NEDV)</p>	<p>76 Executive MBA from a European Business School</p>	<p>Significant main effects reported in ideal self, pathways thinking, and resilience as a result of the coaching process. Effect on ideal self dimensions and resilience were positively moderated by the perceived quality of the relationship and the coachee's levels of self-efficacy.</p>
<p>Study 3: <i>Coaching for Cultural Sensitivity: Content Analysis applying Hofstede's Framework to a Select Set of the International Coach Federation (ICF) Core Competencies</i></p>	<p>-Which is the level of cultural sensitivity embedded in ICF's competency model? -How could be both the competencies definition/ indicators and their depiction, more culturally sensitive?</p>	<p>Cultural Intelligence (CQ) & Cross-Cultural Competence (Dolan & Kawamura, 2015; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000); Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 2006); Hofstede's Research Based Cultural Framework (1980;2005).</p>	<p>Selective integrated literature review; Interrater reliability through a critical qualitative content analysis on the competency model selected.</p>	<p>Competency Model of ICF (6 out of 11 executive competencies analyzed; the grounded core ones).</p>	<p>4 of the 5 Hofstede dimensions fully affect 3 of the 6 ICF competencies (<i>questioning, direct communication, awareness</i>) A composite cultural profile of the 6 competencies is provided as an artifact of the collective cultural assumptions embedded in the model.</p>

Paper I

In the first study, by tapping into a consistent sample of executives, we are able to provide an empirical, evidence-based model framework of constructs which might work as moderators in any coaching process when the overall value is assessed by its recipients (the coaching clients – *coachees*). The predominant research question this study seeks to answer is: *What are the crucial elements that might be moderating clients' value perception of an executive coaching process?* The research data was generated from 197 semi-structured face-to-face interviews to executive bank branches executives (M=44, sd=2.91; 73% men) who participated in a 3 months coaching process offered by their employer to improve their leadership skills. The subsequent data-coding was developed by using *thematic analysis* methodology (Boyatzis, 1998). The *inter-rater reliability agreement* (IRR) of the analysis was pursued by using two independent coders through four separate coding phases. Based on the number of times (*frequency of presence*) that a construct was mentioned across the gathered information and within a specific coding group, were identified a set of *moderator factors* ($\text{kappa} \geq 0.8$ in each of them).

Driven on the evidence reported, the following model illustrates the specific moderating dimensions that may anticipate the perception of value when a coaching process assessed:



As a result of this inductive exploratory approach, we posit that our model specifically helps in: (1) identifying the evidence-based active ingredients perceived by executives as highly valuable over their coaching processes, from both the coach side (i.e., *reliableness*, as a composite of *trust*, *transparency* and *presence* deployed by the coach, as combined to *meaningful guidance*, *specific actions taken by the coach in pro-actively approaching coaching goals*) and the executive side (i.e., perception of increased *self-awareness*, described as *in-sessions acquired understanding of strengths and weaknesses*, as a requirement to develop an agenda based on personal vision); (2) predicting the potential effectiveness of vision-based coaching processes; (3) signaling directions toward further research on willingness to be coached – *coachability* – and its specific impact on coaching effectiveness moderators.

The results of this first study suggest that executive's value perception of a coaching process effectiveness under strength, visioning-based dynamics – orienting individuals to primarily focus on things they do well and inspire, is contingent on a set of moderators that lies in both coach's and coachee's side. Those insights uncover a thought-provoking road to research beyond the coaching agendas sphere sharpened by literature. Specifically, with regard to coachee's side, our analysis connect to the individual's *coachability*, *the executive's deep intent on wanting to change and develop* as evidenced by two of the factors consistently emerged: *executive's self-awareness deployment* and *executive's adherence to be coached and to reflect upon the overall process*.

One of the overall clearest contributions emanating from this qualitative exploratory design is that coaching relationship is not only playing a powerful role in coaching outcomes (i.e., *reinforced commitment to goals connected to vision*), but is indeed also significant itself on the perception of high value. The 95% of the executive coachees in this sample explicitly or indirectly referred to the quality of the relationship as a crucial factor on their processes value assessment. These insights signal and allow common ground for further explorations on this research direction, especially with regard to the moderator factors that specifically build up a vision-based high quality coaching conversation.

We consider that the constructs emerged from this study may be a valid artifact to further measure the extent to which those specific dimensions are present in forging a high quality coaching relationship, yet additional dimensions might remain still untangled since the constructs have been driven from a reflective approach.

Paper II

From their suggested theoretical framework, Segers *et al.*, (2011: 208) observed that the biggest gap in the existing coaching literature is in the “*how*” dimension of their ‘coaching cube’ (i.e. *which coaching approaches are being used?*) and particularly, with regards to the differences in *impact* and the *effectiveness of approaches*.

As a continuation of the previous study and given the lack of theory related to the central elements that build the quality of the coach-coachee relationship and its potential implications on coaching outcomes regarding the internal processing of the individual being coached, through the second main study of the dissertation (published in the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences – JABS*), we are able to enrich the evidence-based theorizing on coaching process and impact with a focus on the specific theoretical approach of *Intentional Change Theory* (ICT; Boyatzis, 2006). According to ICT, high-quality relationships are the center around which desired and sustained change evolve. In our study, the key dimensions of the coaching connection are represented as *shared vision*, *shared compassion*, and *overall positive mood between coach and coachee*. These elements are referred throughout the paper as ‘emotional saliency’, describing the relational tone attained through the coaching space (from the coachee's perspective). Hence, this paper proposes ICT-based coaching as an alternative to traditional

approaches by primarily emphasizing the exploration and articulation of an individual's ideal self² (IS) as the deep driver of any adult developmental process.

Concretely, we offer rigorous evidence with regard to the coaching impact on executive MBA's cognitive-emotional processing – in terms of IS construction (revealed in their personal vision), goal-directed energy levels, and resilience (as the capacity to rebound with more energy from challenges). In addition, we examine whether the quality of the coaching connection (*emotional saliency*) and the coachee's general self-efficacy affect the expected coaching outcome³.

As a consistent coaching framework having evolved from the self-directed learning theory (Kolb & Boyatzis, 1970), ICT is a change methodology that embraces a non-linear process model which has successfully been implemented in the context of management education (Batista-Foguet, Boyatzis, Guillen, & Serlavos, 2008). Specifically, ICT-based coaching assists individuals in creating sustained and desired change through a process involving several epiphanies: discovery and articulation of IS (values, core identity, intrinsic aspirations); assessment of real self (current realities) as compared to the IS; formulation of learning goals; implementation of deliberate practices; and development of a mutually positive coaching relationship. When the coaching process engages in exercises such as envisioning a meaningful future, reconnecting with personal values, discovering strengths, and expressing gratitude for supportive relationships in the client's context, the "PEA"⁴ state is evoked.

Our ultimate aim in this study is to shed light on how coaches using ICT effectively build coaching dynamics that help individuals engage in sustainable change, which enriches both their leadership careers and lives. In particular, the main research questions that have certainly guided this paper are:

- *Does a coaching process primarily connected to PEA significantly influence the coachee's personal vision; goal directed thinking; resilience?*

- *To what extent does the coachee's general self-efficacy moderate the potential impact of coaching outcomes?*

- *To what extent does the quality of the coaching session, as perceived by the coachee, moderate the potential impact of the coaching session?*

²From our perspective, the overall measure of Ideal Self (i.e., IS overall) provides consistent information regarding the level of vision comprehensiveness and strength. Specifically, personal vision includes (a) a compelling image of a person's IS; (b) a comprehensive sense of his or her real self as the core identity (e.g., strengths, traits, and other dispositions); and (c) hope (whose constituents are self-efficacy and optimism; Boyatzis et al., 2012).

³The independent variables are the treatment (i.e., coaching sessions), the perception of the quality of the coaching connection by the coachee (through *shared vision, shared compassion and overall positive mood*), and the coachee's general self-efficacy.

⁴Coaching with regard to the PEA –*Positive Emotional Attractors*- involves focusing on the client's agenda, emphasizing his/her ideal self, and maintaining an overall positive emotional tone. In contrast, coaching to the *Negative Emotional Attractors* (NEA) involves using external standards, performance pressure, or controls on the individual being coached. Albeit both states are necessary to the developmental process, ICT posits that clients who experience greater PEA (relative to NEA) are more likely to sustain behavioral changes in a long term perspective.

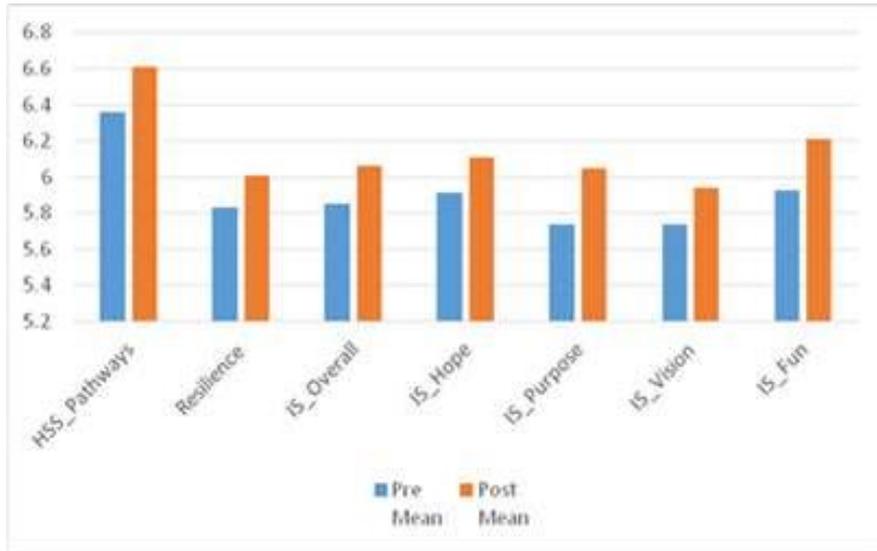


Figure 1. Visual Presentation of the Pre-Post Changes in the Dependent Variables

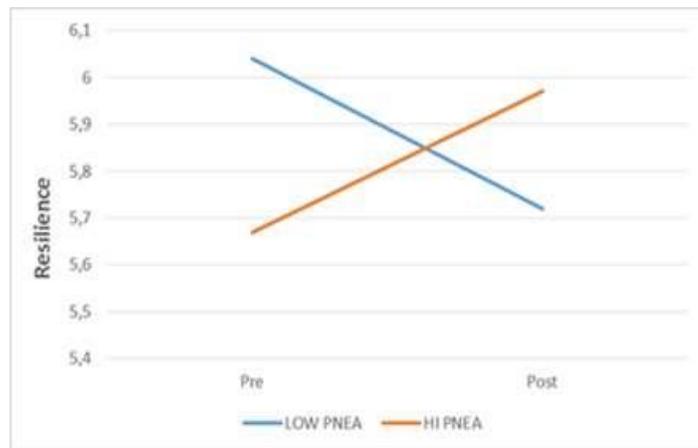


Figure 2. Pre versus Post Resilience scores at the Different Levels of Emotional Salience

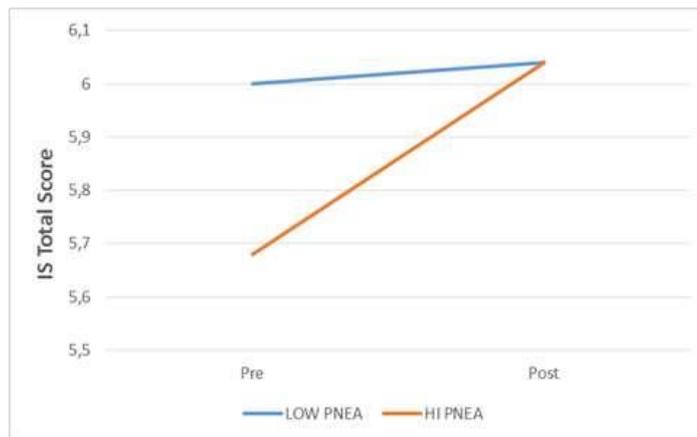


Figure 3. Pre versus Post Ideal Self (IS) total scores at the Different Levels of Emotional Salience

As shown in *Figure 1*⁵, participants reported a significantly greater degree of personal vision comprehensiveness and strength as a result of their coaching process, which was reflected in the increases in their overall Ideal Self (IS) scores. This increase was evident in four of the five dimensions related to the operationalization of the IS (i.e., *hope, sense of purpose, holistic vision, and fun*). In addition to the main effects on IS, *cognitive pathways* (i.e., one of the two dimensions analyzed within *goal-directed energy*) and *resilience*, a series of moderation effects were identified (*Figures 2 & 3*): the quality of the coaching connection with regard to its emotional salience raises as a crucial factor, as it has a moderating effect on resilience and personal vision, with a stronger increase when high emotional saliency was reported. This evidences the critical role of creating a safe atmosphere through a high-quality connection in terms of shared vision, shared compassion, and overall positive mood (*relational energy deployed through the interaction*), competence that coaches should be able to master in any coaching dynamic.

Moreover, it is important to note that the significant changes evidenced in both resilience and personal vision were also moderated by the coachees' general self-efficacy levels⁶. Higher levels of general self-efficacy were evident for those who reported higher levels of resilience and overall ideal self as a result of the coaching session, which brings a novel insight and highlights the need for future research regarding these specific moderating effects⁷.

The practical implications of this research are vast: firstly, the results indicate that (a) coaching individuals with predominant regard to their positive emotional attractors necessarily involves building a specific emotionally salient space as this has a significant positive effect on the coachees' perception of the quality of the coaching; (b) significant salience of the relational

⁵ Prior to using Cronbach's alpha for each construct measured in this paper, we checked the application conditions, as each item must be tau-equivalent (Bollen, 1989), which generally means having unidimensional factorial structures and equal-item variances. When these conditions were not fulfilled, we applied Heise and Bohrnstedt's (1970) coefficient, which only requires the factor structure.

⁶ A series of 2 x 2 split-plot ANOVA were conducted using a validated resilience scale as the dependent variable and including the factors of time point (*pre* versus *post*), group (*low* versus *high self-efficacy*) and group (*low* versus *high emotional saliency*). The main effect of time point was insignificant, $t(37) = -1.375$, $p = .177$; the main effect of group was significant, $t(36) = -3.521$, $p = .001$. This analysis reveals that the high self-efficacy group scored higher on resilience than the low self-efficacy group. According to this, overall (*pre + post*) resilience scores were significantly higher post-coaching for the high self-efficacy group compared to the low self-efficacy group.

⁷ For further details on the analysis and results, please check: Mosteo, L.P., Batista Foguet, J.M., Mckeever, J.D., & Serlavós, R. (2016). Understanding Cognitive-Emotional Processing through a Coaching Process: The Influence of Coaching on Vision, Goal Directed Energy and Resilience. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences*, 51, 64-96.

space contributes to higher levels of cognitive, perceptual, and emotional performances in the coachee (i.e., *increased pathways as cognitive routes in goal orientation; higher comprehensiveness and strength on vision*), as well as achieving open and healthier states in preparation for present and future challenges (i.e., *resilience*), ingredients that strongly support behavior change in leadership development processes. Additionally, this evidence will help shape how coaches frame coaching conversations and develop coaching relationships by better understanding and managing the “embodied” coaching experience, and subsequently provide a clear picture on how to train them on building emotional salient spaces through meaningful, engaging dialogue with clients.

Paper III

Finally, inspired by our concern on better understanding the coaching connection generated between coach-coachee, and the central role of the coach on creating a fostering coaching space and leading those high quality engaging dialogues, the third study attempt to answer our third main research question, by tapping directly into the “who” dimension (*coaches’ competencies*). Concretely, we analyze how culture biases might be embedded in the most widely-used set of coaching competencies (the ones proposed as core by the *International Coach Federation –ICF–* competency model), motivated by: (1) our understanding of each human interaction as a cultural depiction that comprises blended social, cognitive and emotional elements; (2) the realization of that current coaching competency models do not present a clear research-based architecture. Indeed, gaps are evident since competency models employed by professional associations: (a) have their origins in the Western hemisphere with a number of embedded cultural assumptions (being now applied globally to prepare and certify professional coaches, accredit training and education providers), and (b) do not explicitly address the cross-cultural applicability of their models.

Concretely, this study enables us to explore the cultural structure rooted in the competency model chosen, in particular to evaluate its six core coaching competencies (*Trust and Intimacy; Presence; Active Listening; Powerful Questioning; Direct Communication; Creating awareness*) building upon the multi-year systematic literature review done by Maltbia and colleagues (2014) by which 10 of the 11 ICF’s competencies have been critically reviewed and theoretically grounded. Specifically, we provide a first step in conceptually clarifying cultural competence in coaching education and training through an evidence-base composite cultural profile, as a premise on understanding cultural dynamics as foundations for developing coaches’ intercultural intelligence.

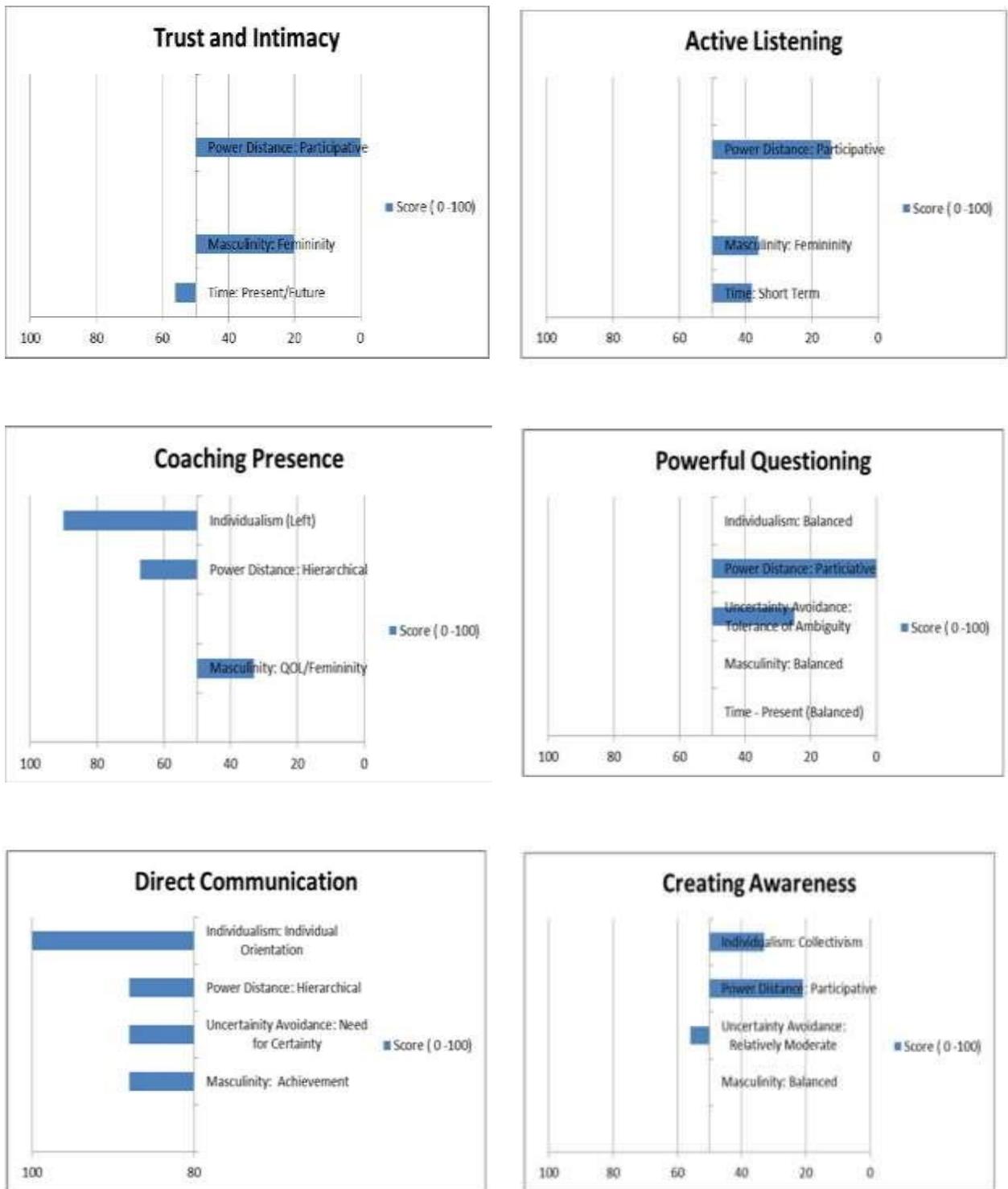
From this paper insights, we contend that increasing cultural sensitivity in any coaching competency model requires meeting rigorous psychometric properties of validity and reliability in its constitution –both contributing to conceptual clarity and utility (i.e., *credibility*), as a preliminary step on building coaching competency models upon a cultural sensitive research-based architecture. We concretely displayed that diverse cultural dimensions are activated when analyzing the selected 6 core coaching competencies⁸. Indeed, through a moderate to high inter-rater agreement among the independent coders, the analysis done reveals that the directionality of the 5 cultural orientations used (Hofstede’s model) shift depending on behavioral indicators associated with each competence. Observing the cultural profiles composite linked to each of

⁸ The findings presented in this paper are based on a rigorous content analysis applying Hofstede’s cultural dimensions research framework. The analysis was conducted at two levels, amongst three independent coders through the four different rounds that comprised the design.

the 6 competencies (*Figure 4* shows the interactions among each competence and the activated cultural dimensions), we have been able to exhibit that when coaches: co-creating the relationship through (1) *trust and intimacy* and (2) *coaching presence*; striving to communicate effectively through the enactment of competencies as (3) *active listening*, (4) *powerful questioning*, and (5) *direct communication*; and facilitating learning and results by endorsing the competence of (6) *creating awareness*, they are adhering to a specific cultural depiction of those competencies, and thus, we contend that: (a) coaches should maintain a self-aware stance to their competencies deployment when adhering to the precise behavioral indicators defined by the model; (b) they should complete the *Culture in the Workplace Questionnaire (CWQ)* or related measures to increase awareness of their particular cultural programming to explicitly attend to cultural dynamics in their coaching engagements; (c) these competencies definition and indicators must be critically revisited by its initiators in order to consider a more culturally sensitive architecture of its core structure; (d) and overall, coaching training curricula still need to address cross-cultural aspects intensively.

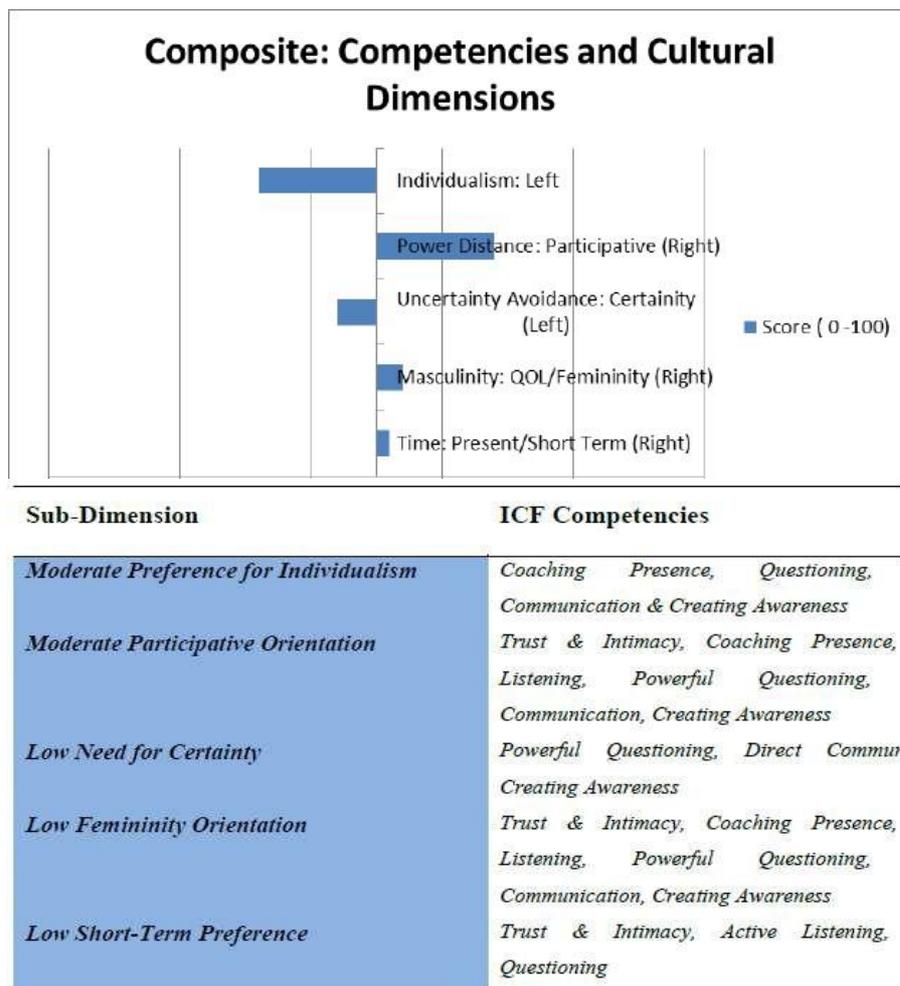
This study reached to establish preliminary robust ground for further research on understanding interplay between modes of cultural programming and core coaching competencies.

Figure 4. Core Coaching Competencies and Activated Cultural Dimensions



The composite cultural profile of the six ICF competencies included in this analysis (see *Figure 5* below) is an artifact of the collective cultural assumptions embedded in the ICF competency model. The table below lists the specific competencies that influenced the overall directionality of each cultural sub-dimension. Our analysis shows that directionality shifts depending on behavioral indicators associated with each competency —suggesting the application of cultural competence in coaching is both dynamic and complex.

Figure 5. *Composite Profile: Intersection between ICF competencies and Hofstede’s cultural dimensions*



Finally, while this study's cultural profiles could be further replicated, Hofstede's cultural dimensions are likely to be highly embedded in both definitions and indicators of the six competencies analyzed—which raises questions about whether cultural competence should be separately added or embedded into existing competencies models. We explicitly recommend:

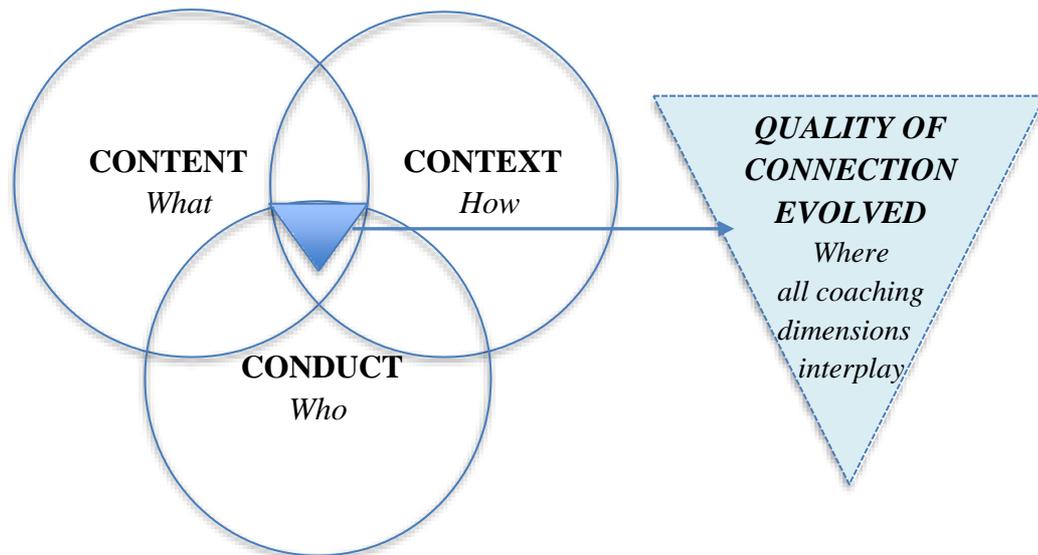
- Embedding cultural competence in existing competencies given: (a) cultural assumptions already appear in existing models; (b) doing so could enhance cultural sensitivity by making existing competencies less ethnocentrically grounded and more ethno-relatively oriented; (c) this approach requires reexamining competencies and ensuring related indicators reflect the full range of each cultural dimension;
- Identifying clear foundational capabilities needed to develop cultural competence and disseminating guidelines to coach training providers to: (a) assess cultural self-awareness and capability; (b) establish cultural knowledge base; (c) build skills to communicate, listen and coach cross-culturally.

We are aware of that intercultural competency development is a nonlinear process that involves triggering within individuals cognitive elements (i.e., intellectual awareness and knowledge); affective elements (i.e., emotional awareness and affective growth); and last, behavioral components (i.e., skill building and behavior change). Thus, in order to develop intercultural competency when coaching, changes at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels must be consciously experienced. We know that this requires cultural courage, since doing so activates “*cultural guards*,” who have created, and/or benefit from, existing competency model and credentialing systems. Yet, given the relevance of developing coach cultural competence for today's global diversity, we contend it is less a question of “*if*,” but rather “*when and how*.”

Conclusions

Helping is a fundamental human activity that exists in different forms across all human cultures (Egan, 2009). ‘*Executive coaching*’ has emerged as a new type of formalized helping relationship in which skilled professionals assist clients in making desired changes. We contend that slight yet important modifications in the way we shape coaching conversations can yield dramatically improved results in terms of both specific impact and sustainability of behavior change. Our overall research holds that it is only within the context of a high-quality relationship that meaningful, sustainable competencies development may occur.

Through this dissertation we not only contribute to shed light on the major gap evidenced in the field (See Table , the coaching impact – the *how*, concurrently affected by coaches' competencies (the *who*) and the space co-created in between coach-coachee (*where all dimensions interplay*), we are adding robust evidence by exploring moderators allocated in both coach's and coachee's side, which have been barely considered up to now. A visual depiction of the strategy built:



Our intellectual integrity rests on our willingness to put our methods, practices, and theories to a test. In this sense, research should focus on what produces effective coaching, not merely normative or descriptive approaches to what some do. Indeed, we believe that coaching is still a practice in search of a backbone, two backbones actually: a scientific, evidence-based backbone and a theoretical backbone. Yet, the effort of this dissertation studies taps into those directions.

Finally, the next table presents a visual overview of the main research questions and main theoretical, empirical and practical contributions resulted from each of the studies that the dissertation comprises. We consider that these are relevant findings that may indeed guide an empirical evidence-based development of the profession as well as the choices that are made in the definition of competency models, as in the recruitment, development, deployment, and matching of executive coaches.

Main theoretical, empirical and practical contributions

Study	Main research question	Main theoretical and empirical contributions	Main practical contributions
<p>Study 1 – <i>An Integrative Framework on Executive Coaching Perceived Value from the Coachee's Side</i> - <i>The What</i> -</p>	<p>What are the crucial factors that might be moderating executive's value perception of an executive coaching process? To what extend those moderators might depend on coach's or coachee's side?</p>	<p>This study revisits the paucity of studies on executives' perception of coaching value and provides an empirical evidence based model-framework of constructs which work as moderators when the overall value of a coaching process is assessed by its direct recipients –<i>Bank Branches Executives</i>, regardless of the coaching approached used by the coaches (all vision, strength-based). Coaching value perception is contingent on a set of at least 4 moderators which not only lies in the coach's but also in the coachee's characteristics. By providing this model we contribute to determining predictive value of the active ingredients on coaching effectiveness and help to better understand and shape how to foster coachee's adherence to the process.</p>	<p>The identification of those 4 moderator factors connect to pioneering insights with regard to the space created by the coach as well as the coachee's readiness to be coached, as leveraging possibilities on the coachee must be coupled with nuanced coaching wisdom and abilities such as knowing when and what change a client is ready for (<i>coach's meaningful guidance</i>), plus the responsibility deployed through the process by coachee (<i>self-awareness of strengths and limitations and adherence to reflect within and among sessions</i>). As part of the first construct moderator (<i>reliableness</i>), four main dimensions emerged as boosters of the coaching relationship from the perspective of the coaching recipient: <i>trust, transparency, presence, and availability</i>, primarily enabled by the coach.</p>
<p>Study 2 – <i>Understanding Cognitive-Emotional Processing through a Coaching Process: the Influence of Coaching on Vision, Goal-directed Energy and Resilience</i> - <i>The How</i> -</p>	<p>To what extend an ICT-based coaching process might affect coachee's cognitive and motivational resources? Are there moderators on the ICT-based coaching impact?</p>	<p>This study enriches the evidence-based theorizing on coaching process and outcomes with a focus on a specific theoretical developmental umbrella, Intentional Change Theory-Coaching based. Insights on coaching impact regarding coachee's emotional-cognitive processing and key moderators on the process are rigorously analyzed. We contribute to theorizing on high quality coaching relationships creation through the exploration of significant factors (<i>shared vision, shared compassion, overall positive mood</i>) by which those are shaped. Also, the growth-oriented role that the quality of the connection (perceived as <i>emotionally salient</i> by the coachee) plays in preparing individuals emotionally and cognitively for development and change is specifically explored.</p>	<p>The evidence reported through this study helps enlighten how coaches should frame coaching processes by shaping spaces and conversations which increase cognitive and motivational resources in the coachee. While helping coaches understand and manage the embodied coaching experience through the primarily stimulation of <i>positive emotional attractors</i> and <i>ideal-self</i> evocation, this research contributes to inform of best practices to be incorporated in coaches training with regard to coaching engagement, where a meaningful salient space through emotional attunement emerges as both booster and moderator.</p>
<p>Study 3 – <i>Coaching for Cultural Sensitivity: Content Analysis applying Hofstede's Framework to a Select Set of the International Coach Federation (ICF) Core Competencies</i> - <i>The Who</i> -</p>	<p>Which is the level of cultural sensitivity embedded in ICF's competency model? How could be improved the cultural sensitivity of both competencies definition/indicators, and practice?</p>	<p>This study identifies certain degree of cultural bias embedded in the 6 core coaching competencies encompassed by the most widely-used coaching competency model (ICF's). The identification done and the formulation of subsequent implications connect to a double theoretical need: (1) To build conceptual clarity in both competencies definition and indicators with regard to cultural competence in coaches education, training, and credentialing; and (2) to open up an evidence based inquiry road on coaching competency modeling built on a research-based competencies architecture.</p>	<p>The critical content analysis done through this study provides an evidence-based detailed cultural composite profile of the 6 core coaching competencies. By doing so, we help to acknowledge cultural biases in the model construction, while also facilitating to increase conceptual clarity regarding cultural coaching competence as a first step on building self-aware executive coaches who might need to operate across cultural boundaries –a key requirement in current global educational and workspaces. This study also constitutes a preliminary step on developing metacognition on cultural intelligence.</p>

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