

The Coaching Journey

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Intellectual growth should commence at birth and only cease at death. — Albert Einstein

Abstract: Every coach is on a journey. The moment they enter a coach training program or begin coaching, they enter a path of exploration with clients as well as beginning self-exploration, discernment, and experiencing profound shifts. This study investigates that journey through the lens of professional development, expertise, and a way of being. Through semi-structured interviews of a wide range of coaches, from novice to expert, a set of differences along a spectrum has been compiled, along with development strategies to assist coaches on this journey toward expertise. Also explored is how coaches stay fit for purpose and an assessment of the demand for coach education, the offerings for such education, and an assessment of the real needs for coaches to develop toward expertise.

Keywords: professional development, coaching, reflective practice, lifelong learning

Background

Introduction

We frequently say that coaching is about transformation and change (Bennett & Bush, 2014). That is—transformation and change in a client. Little work has been done, however, in exploring the change in the coach as she transforms from a novice, through proficiency, and to an expert coach. This study set out to understand how coaches maintain their skills, but as the data unfolded, it became evident that a much richer story was emerging, that of the journey coaches embark upon from the moment they learn about coaching and have that first dialogue with a client to expert coaching with its fluid and free-ranging holistic dialogue.

A study of this nature requires information from several domains. The field of education offers several theories on adult learning, used to explain the process of professional development for individual change. Second, the field of cognitive psychology looks at the characteristics, stages, and cognition of expertise. And finally, the field of positive psychology studies the significance of relationships in bringing about growth and change—a way of being. While much of the research tends to focus on teacher-student or leader-subordinate relationships, we can extrapolate this information to understand coach-client relationships, i.e. how coaches learn and how they apply their knowledge and skills to support positive client outcomes.

The coaching literature emphasizes growth and development from the client perspective, frequently applying adult learning theories for the purpose of enhancing client development (Cox, 2006; Gray, 2006). Unfortunately, development of the coach does not receive as much attention. For example, Cox suggests that the coach must work to “help the client understand assumptions and beliefs and uncover their roots” because “it is not possible to articulate assumptions without the help of others” (2006, p.198). Combining this secondary data with primary data from qualitative sources allows us to integrate the data and bring form to the shape of the coaching journey.

The International Coach Federation (ICF) believes that professional development is important for developing competence and staying fit for purpose. A coach is expected to continually develop coaching skills and maintain existing skills to keep pace with industry expectations and emerging standards in order to provide the best value to their clients. As such, professional development is viewed as an important aspect of upholding professional standards. All ICF members pledge to adhere to a code of ethics, which includes a commitment to their continuing development, “As a coach, I: 28) Commit to the need for continued and ongoing development of my professional skills” (International Coach Federation, 2018a). ICF also requires its credential-holders to maintain their knowledge and skills through a minimum number of continuing coach education units (CCEUs) for credential renewal (ICF, 2018b).

The overall objective of this study is to provide coaches with an analysis and recommendation of professional development strategies to support quality learning and coaching. This paper is intended to synthesize research on professional development practices and provide lessons and experiences among coach practitioners. Coaches can then, in turn, use this information to formulate and implement a personalized professional development plan. To protect privacy, the names of participants have been omitted from the narrative. Participants are simply referred to as “Coach” followed by a Roman letter or a number.

Professional Development

Adult education theory attempts to explain the process of professional development for individual change. The adult learning theories most relevant to the coaching context include: Andragogy (Knowles, 1980), Reflective Practice (Boud, 1994; Dewey, 1910; Schon, 1984), Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1990), and Experiential Learning (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984).

One of the original models in adult education was Knowles' (1980) Andragogy model which stated that adults learn differently than children. Specifically, adults have lifetime experiences to draw upon to inform learning processes. The key principles state: adults learn through active hands-on experiences; adults need learning to be relevant and immediately useful; adults need learning to relate to what they already know; adults learn in a welcoming environment where they feel safe to participate; and adults learn through practice and feedback (Knowles, 1980). The principles of the model suggest that self-directed, experiential, and problem-centered approaches are best for enhancing adult learning practices. In turn, activities based on these principles increase motivation and enable achievement of adult learners (Knowles, 1980).

Reflective practice, another professional development activity, derives from the works of Dewey, Schon, and Boud. According to Dewey (1910), reflective practice refers to "the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it" (p. 6). This means the adult learner takes a questioning approach to learning, considering 'why' and 'how' questions.

Schon (1983) builds on Dewey's perspective in his book *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. For Schon, reflection has two aspects: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action refers to the thinking and reacting that takes place while an individual is doing something. Reflection-on-action takes place after a situation has occurred where an individual considers the situation after the fact. A reflective practitioner is one who is able to think in the moment and uses feedback loops of experience, learning, and practice to improve their work (Schon, 1983).

Boud, Keogh, & Walker (1985) provide a cyclical model for learning in which experience and reflection lead to learning. In this model, focus is given to analyzing the experience after it occurs on both an emotional and cognitive level. For Boud and colleagues, the learning experience can occur in any setting—formal or informal. A setting is not just the physical environment but also the norms and rules of behavior along with the personal characteristics of the individuals who are part of it. The setting becomes the context of learning by way of the learner's entry into it.

Transformative learning is the third theory of adult learning that can inform coaches' professional development. Mezirow (1990) introduced transformational learning as a process for changing an individual's frames of reference. Frames of reference refer to "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

Several theorists have expanded on Mezirow's transformative learning theory in order to go beyond his emphasis on rationality and lack of attention on context and other ways of knowing (Kitchenham, 2008; Taylor, 1997). Taylor (1997) proposes a process model that accounts for the role of context, varying nature of the catalysts of transformative learning, increased role of other ways of knowing, and importance of relationships. Based on a review of empirical research, Taylor (2007) finds that relationships that boost confidence and develop mutual trust and respect are the most significant factors for creating perspective transformation learning experiences. Seeking deeper understanding through critical thinking and reflection—that is not just rationally based but also includes emotions, intuition, and empathy—is also important for transformative learning (Taylor, 2008).

Experiential learning is another approach for explaining professional development best practices. A popular model referenced in the literature is Kolb's learning cycle which stipulates that individuals learn from their life experiences, even on an everyday basis (Kolb, 1984). According to Kolb (1984), the process of learning follows a pattern or cycle consisting of four stages. The first stage is the experience itself, which becomes the content for learning. Reflection, or the deliberate mental reviewing and recording of the experience, is the second stage. Kolb refers to this as reflective observation. In the third stage, abstract conceptualization takes place where an individual generates a hypothesis about the meaning of the experience. Through active experimentation, the fourth stage, the individual tests their interpretation to see if new experiences will support or challenge the hypothesis. Any experience has the potential for

learning, but reflecting, interpreting, and experimenting are the active ingredients for yielding growth and development.

Expertise

Research on expertise in the field of cognitive psychology can also contribute to the professional development of coaches. The field has looked at these concepts to better understand the processes and outcomes of learning and performance. Much of the research has concluded that experts are made and not born (Ericsson, Hoffman, Kozbelt, & Williams, 2018). With the right ingredients, individuals can turn themselves into an expert of their craft.

By studying expert performance, psychologists have been able to identify characteristics that contribute to learning. Key characteristics include: deliberate practice, motivation, coach/teacher role, feedback, and performance (Ericsson & Smith, 1991). The pursuit to expertise is one of deliberate practice—persistent training with full concentration rather than just time is key. The development of expertise also requires grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). And, practice is often guided by a skilled expert, coach, or mentor that serves as a feedback loop. Training is a qualitative difference in paying attention, not a quantitative measure of clocking a certain number of hours (Ericsson, 2008; Goleman, 2013).

Motivation is another characteristic this field of psychology has deemed important for growth and development. From this perspective, expertise is the drive to make progress and get better and better at something that matters (Pink, 2011). The yearning to learn and create new things is an innate human drive (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In other words, the desire to become proficient in a craft is an important driver of behavior. If desire, or motivation, is low, then learning, or growth and development, becomes a challenge. Therefore, intelligent individuals and organizations have looked at ways to tap into and enhance an individual's desire in order to improve performance and increase satisfaction (Pink, 2011).

The field has also looked at the stages of development in adult learning. Two models are useful for the field of coaching: the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition and Bloom's Taxonomy. The Dreyfus model of skill acquisition (2004) identifies five stages of development. The model describes the different stages an individual must progress through to achieve mastery. Mastery, as the sixth stage later added to the model, is the final stage in which only a small number of experts achieve, according to Dreyfus & Dreyfus (2008). Similarly, Bloom's Taxonomy identifies three domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor; Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, Krathwohl, 1956). Each domain is broken down into levels of objectives, moving through the lowest-order processes to the highest (Krathwohl, 2002). Both models represent a progression in learning.

Cognitive psychology has also considered thinking processes to better understand growth and development. Specifically, the field has looked at the automaticity of cognition (Howell, 1982; Taylor, 2007). Research has pointed out that automaticity plays an important role in expertise (Feltovich, Prietula, & Ericsson 2006). Automaticity being the ability to do something through nonconscious thinking (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). What is important is integrating top-down focus and bottom-up focus, meaning cognition and automaticity. As the researchers indicate, too much automation can lead to stagnation in which the person ceases to grow and stalls at a given proficiency level. Working towards expertise means continually shifting away from autopilot and back into active, corrective attention (Foer, 2011). The intuition that develops from this interactive process of learning is a combination of understanding the theory of a craft and becoming skilled at the practice of the craft (Fromm, 1956). Through these cognitive learning processes, expertise and craft become an essence of being.

The same research indicates that expertise also involves the ability to reflect and to adapt (Feltovich et al, 2006; Zimmerman, 2006). Thinking about and evaluating the outcome of a performance helps an individual enhance knowledge on successful strategies for future use. Deconstructing a performance also helps an individual identify strategies that did not work in order to modify action the next time. Being in

tune with the self through reflective thinking means an individual can make necessary adjustments to practice, in-the-moment or in-the-future.

A Way of Being

The field of positive psychology has looked at the interactional relationship when considering growth and development of an individual. Carl Rogers, a humanistic psychologist, advocated for person-centered learning in his seminal work, *A Way of Being*, in 1980. He advocated for individuals to adopt a more person-centered mindset in order to tap into human potential. According to Rogers, an individual needs an environment that provides them with genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (being seen with unconditional positive regard), and empathy (being listened to and understood) in order to grow and reach their full human potential (Rogers, 1980).

The field of coaching has frequently applied this person-centered perspective to the client which has contributed to creating conditions for clients to flourish. This same powerful perspective on humaneness can be applied to the professional development of coaches. When considering this professional development of coaches themselves, nurturing a way of being is also important. This means that a professional development approach for coaches should follow coach-centered coach education. Coaches should not only be creating conditions that empower their clients to learn but also be nurturing their own environment for being in touch with their mind, body, and spirit. Professional development, then, entails the means for developing the conditions that enhance a coach's own way of being.

Methods

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to examine the perceptions, meanings, and practices of professional development of coaches. The research design followed a mixed methods approach consisting of a literature review, a qualitative grounded theory methodology, and a quantitative descriptive inventory. The methodology applied an exploratory, grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis to allow for emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006). This approach was selected in order to get rich, detailed accounts of professional development.

To answer the question ‘how do coaches stay fit for purpose?’, a review of literature on adult learning was conducted to identify the processes researchers have found effective for professional development. Theories on adult learning from the fields of education, cognitive psychology, and positive psychology were examined. This literature was used to inform the next steps of the study, including qualitative interviews and a quantitative supply-demand-needs inventory.

Qualitative

The qualitative part of the study included semi-structured interviews with coaches and an analysis of open-ended responses on an ICF professional development survey. The format of semi-structured interviews allowed for both structure and flexibility by providing consistency while allowing for opportunity to explore and to clarify responses. These interviews were used to better understand the experiences and insights of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Three samples were selected for this study. The first sample included 11 expert coaches which were selected using purposive sampling to get insights from advanced level practitioners. Skewing the sample allowed for preliminary findings to inform the second phase of interviews. The second sample included eight coaches who were chosen randomly from a volunteer panel of ICF-identified coaches who had previously agreed to assist with research. This random (within-group) probability sample selected for different coaches based on ICF credential (ACC, PCC, MCC credentials, and no credentials). For the third group of participants, a snowball sample was used to recruit five coaching supervisors. Supervisors provided their perspective on the professional development needs of coaches.

In total, 25 coaches voluntarily participated. Participants resided in Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, and United States. Of the 25 participants, 20 were ICF members and 5 were not a member of ICF. Out of the 20 ICF members, 18 held an ICF coaching credential: 5 ACC, 9 PCC, 4 MCC. Age of the participants ranged from 41 to 68. Of the 25 participants, 19 were female, 6 were male. Coaching hours of the participants ranged from 500 to 14,000. As a highly educated group, the majority of the coaches, 18, had post undergraduate college education (e.g. Master’s degree or Doctoral degree). A majority of the coaches, 22, had also participated in some formal coach certification training.

The interview guide was sent to participants before their scheduled interview so they had time to reflect on their professional development and coaching experiences. Questions asked were about their coaching background, their definition of effective coaching, skills required to perform effective coaching, their professional development activities, strategies, and insights, their perspective on levels or stages of coaching, and their view on continuing education. Interviews were conducted via phone, Skype, or Zoom. Field notes were used and entered into MAXQDA software for coding. As part of the analysis, checking with participants (member checks) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) was done to verify the main themes. The code system included 10 overarching codes broken down into 46 sub-codes, 8 lexical codes, and 101 in-vivo codes. The iterative coding process resulted in two overarching themes and five sub-themes.

Quantitative

The quantitative part of the study used data from an ICF-commissioned study on how coaches spent their time, which included professional development (DiGirolamo, Rogers, Heink, 2016) and from ICF internal tracking of CCEUs. This data was used to inventory the supply and demand of professional development of coaches. A review of the coaching literature was used to identify needs.

Results

The Journey

This section presents a qualitative account of the findings. Analysis resulted in a rich description of professional development experiences of coaches. The findings indicate critical elements of professional development that are important for working towards expertise. The results of the qualitative and quantitative analysis indicate that professional development is a lifelong journey. The analysis also shows that a robust reflective practice is an important element of professional development for coaches. In short: How do coaches stay fit for purpose? They are: practicing and reflecting.

For coaches, staying fit for purpose means going on a journey, engaging in reflective practice, and adapting learning to personal needs and dynamic contexts. The first theme, going on a journey, involves being a lifelong learner, deepening belief in coaching, and modeling the way for transformation. Engaging in a reflective practice as a second theme involves deepening coaching presence and taking care of self. The main takeaway from the narrative is that these practices are equally important for every level of expertise and experience.

The Journey Itself

The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction not a destination — Carl Rogers

Many of the coaches talked about both coaching and professional development in terms of a journey. As Coach B emphasized, “the journey of becoming a coach is transformative in and of itself.” Professional development has been an important element on the journey towards expertise for these coaches. Going on the coaching journey means putting in the practice, ensuring quality practice, and engaging in life experiences.

A coach’s professional development journey is one of practice, or showing up to coach with intention. Many coaches talked about how just the act of coaching has helped them develop their practice. But practicing coaching on its own was not sufficient to grow. The findings indicate that coaches have incorporated many other strategies along their journey. The theme of practice is in line with Goleman’s research that practice is only part of the puzzle to performance and success (1995). The professional development journey is not just about the amount of time invested but the quality of that time (Ericsson, 2008).

Many of the coaches referred to their previous life and work experiences as part of their journey for development. Life experiences have enriched coaching practice according to the coaches. This is not to say that life experiences make for an effective coach, but significant life experience is part of the journey of learning. This appears to be a consistent finding in adult learning research—life experiences contribute to learning (Kolb, 1994). Similarly, this research suggests that those experiences contribute to the development of a coach.

A journey of practice, quality time, and experiences involved the themes of being a lifelong learner, modeling the way for transformation, and deepening belief in both the process and the client. The professional development journey theme also supports the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition (Dreyfus, 2004).

Being a Lifelong Learner

Professional development is a lifetime journey — Coach G

On the whole, participants viewed professional development as an ongoing pursuit. Coaches depicted themselves as lifelong learners, which means they are continuously seeking out and are open to personal and professional growth opportunities. As one of the expert coaches stated, professional development is about “having the humility to realize that a coach is always in the process of learning, growing, and developing” (Coach E). Continuous learning is about constantly increasing knowledge and expanding skills. This finding is in line with adult education theory that posits lifelong learning is a concept, a value, and a practice (Crowther & Sutherland, 2008).

Most of the coaches felt that continuing education should be mandatory for coaches. Even the few coaches who did not believe that continuing education should be mandatory, they agreed with the idea that coaches should be lifelong learners and engage in continuous learning. For all the coaches, their journey of development entailed being a perpetual learner, voluntarily.

Even those considered to be top in the field talked about the desire and need to continuously learn. Learning for the advanced coaches partly came from being a leader in the field—they are the ones teaching, mentoring, supervising, assessing, researching, and writing for the field. They also turned to affiliations and collegiality by going to conferences in order to have conversations about coaching, the industry, and future trends. Advanced-level coaches talked about their deliberate engagement in the field in terms of learning.

However, one of the challenges for some of the top-level coaches was finding advanced training, a similar finding in the 2017 Professional Development Survey of ICF coaches (ICF, 2017). A breakdown of ICF-holders by level illustrates that the advanced-level population, or those who hold the highest ICF credential (MCC), is very small, being only about 4% of the total credential-holders. This suggests that supply for continuing coach education in the industry is going to skew towards the higher demand for beginning and intermediate-level coaches and less so for advanced-level coaches.

What was clear from the coaches is that continuous learning comes from a variety of sources, including engaging in life experiences, practicing coaching, reading books, attending trainings, or doing tai chi. As lifelong learners, many are constantly reading up on coaching and other fields related to their specialty area, such as neuroscience or leadership. They are learning through various activities in order to avoid stagnation and to tap into their potential.

Many of the coaches echoed Silsbee’s thoughts on curiosity, “Your spirit of inquiry is the impetus behind your learning. The more curious you are about coaching and mindfulness, and the more committed you are to your own journey to expertise, the richer the results will be” (Silsbee, 2010, p. 232). One of the supervisors equated professional development to “passionate curiosity” both personally and professionally because “we don’t learn if we are not curious” (Coach W). Being curious about the self, others, and the world is part of a lifelong learning mindset (Dweck, 2008). A learner mentality “makes life interesting.” (Coach G).

For these coaches, they have practiced out in the world and not just in their coaching sessions. They have learned from all different things and people. Lifelong learning is about trying to be aware of what is going on in the world, recognizing what it means to live in a global community. Coach E emphasized this points, saying “My whole life is a training ground.”

Modeling the Way for Transformation

Modeling the way for transformation means that the coaches were open to change within themselves in order to support transformation within their clients. This theme stems from assumptions for change. Many see coaching as a way to make the world a better place by helping individuals and organizations make changes. Change starts with the individual, and this includes the coach doing the coaching. For change to occur at the macro-societal level, individual change is necessary—coaches included. This idea of change and growth was very much part of the coach’s philosophy for the majority of interviewees.

Coaches talked about their learning in relation to their expectations of their clients. On the whole, coaches felt they should be responsible and accountable for their own professional development because that is what they demand of their clients. Many of the coaches engage in learning opportunities in order to model the way for their clients. Coaching is about facilitating learning and awareness in the client, therefore, coaches felt they should be familiar with the process for themselves. As one coach said, “if I’m not passionate about growing and developing my skills and continually have a learner mentality, a lack of learner mentality, I imagine, would show up in my clients, and I want my clients to feel like I’m in there with them.” (Coach E). This finding is in line with Silsbee’s sentiments on creating client self-generation, “coaches with integrity demonstrate the same levels of introspection and commitment to their development as they expect of their clients.” (Silsbee, 2010, p. 291).

Supervisors concurred. As one supervisor observed, “If we [as a coach] don’t know what it feels like to be a learner, how do we create the safety and trust to enable learning and change in our client?” (Coach W). Coaches specifically pointed out learning, self-awareness, accountability, and responsibility as the capacities they need to develop within themselves because this is the work they expect of their clients. This means, “Coaches must be able to deepen their own awareness, fluency, and capacity to do the work.” (Coach W).

Deepening Belief in Process and in Client

A shift in belief in both the process and the client appeared to be part of the professional development journey for coaches. When coaches started out on their journey, they had more of what Dweck (2008) refers to as a performance mindset for learning. A performance mindset focuses on task competence in order to gain approving judgements from others. Many coaches started out with a performance mindset in order to be seen as the best coach by their clients. In doing so, coaches focused more on themselves than the client. Coaches talked about how they were so absorbed by trying to ask the right question, applying a technique in the right way, or seeing results when they first started out coaching.

As coaches progressed through their journey, they realized that they needed to get themselves out of the way in order to be fully available for their client. Some coaches talked about how they heard “believe in the process” when they went through their training program, but they did not really know what that meant. In order to believe, they had to go through their own journey of transformation, or ‘aha’ moment, to truly believe “coaching actually works.” Once coaches started to feel more confident in themselves, they could have complete confidence in their clients. In the process, they shifted to what Dweck (2008) refers to as a learning or growth mindset. According to Dweck, a person with a learning mindset is someone who is motivated to increase their competence and to overcome challenging situations. A growth mindset sees obstacles as opportunities and as a natural and constructive part of the learning process. Learning also means finding lessons and inspiration in the success of others. This shift meant coaches turned their focus to the client by handing over the driving wheel to the client, meaning the coach allowed the client to own the session and do more of the work.

Once a coach started to truly believe in the process and in the client, they started to tailor their style and communication to the client’s personality. In this sense, a coach is able to use language to match the client’s frame of mind and preferences. As Coach H explained, “it’s about meeting the client where they need to be met.” Once coaches made the shift, they found themselves in what Silsbee refers to as mindful service, “it is the needs, aspirations, and fulfillment of the client that are at the center of coaching and provide the guiding energy for the process. The coach is there as a resource and a catalyst. It’s all about the client.” (Silsbee, 2010, p. 292).

As coaches progressed on their journey, they let go of their mask of grandiosity and embraced humility and vulnerability, as supervisor (Coach 2) described. Instead of thinking that they were supposed to have all the answers and ask all the right questions in a session, coaches recognized and accepted that even an expert cannot know everything. When setting out on their journey, coaches perceived experts as those

individuals who know everything within their field of expertise. But as coaches progressed on their journey, they came to terms that this was a false notion. They realized that an expert knows a lot but does not know everything. From this perspective, an expert who believes they know everything there is to know is not open to learning, growing, developing, i.e. change. As one supervisor declared, “we can’t know it all” (Coach W). This shift to embracing not knowing all there is to know meant that coaches could sit with themselves in not knowing everything and still show up to a session with a client with complete confidence.

Engaging in Reflective Practice

For the majority of the coaches, their learning journey entailed engaging in some type of ongoing reflective practice in order to stay fit for purpose. This finding is in line with research on reflection and professional development (Schon, 1983). As one of the supervisors shared, reflective practice “is about going deeper and discovering themselves and their impact on others and how they are impacted by others so that they are serving their client from the stance that they hold.”

What does a reflective practice look like? Strategies mentioned by coaches included: mindfulness, yoga, meditation, self-care, physical activities, spiritual practice, therapy, observing life, being curious, experimenting, listening or watching coaching session recordings, taking notes of coaching sessions, journaling, and going to trainings. These reflective practice activities require having a “rigorous self-discipline for self-awareness and self-knowledge” (Coach C).

External feedback is an important element of reflective practice. Coaches also talked about external feedback opportunities through peer coaching, mentor coaching, team coaching, or supervision. As one of the supervisors shared, “supervision is a reflective process [for the coach]. Sitting quietly to think about what they’ve done, why they’ve done it, and how they’ve done it is a struggle for many coaches. Sitting in a dialogue with another helps them do that” (Coach W).

Why do coaches consider these reflective practice activities important for their professional development? According to the coaches, these activities help the coach to ground or center themselves, to learn to be present in the moment, and to clear their mind. Reflective practice was seen as a way to deepen consciousness—becoming aware of one’s own self along with external others. Engaging in reflective practice helped coaches to show up to a session and be fully available for their client and to foster a quality relationship with their client. Reflective practice is “all the inner work that helps create a great deal of resilience” in coaching and in life (Coach B).

Similarly, one of the coaching supervisors identified awareness as one of the top professional development needs of coaches. While a coach creates a safe space for their client to engage in a reflective practice, coaches need to be intentional in giving space to themselves for their own reflective practice. As one supervisor pointed out, “where does the coach go to take their own ‘stuff?’” (Coach T). Her sentiments were in line with most of the coaching supervisors—reflection or awareness were the skills that coaches were lacking the most. In their experiences supervising coaches, they have observed coaches bringing their own “stuff” into coaching. Meaning, they have observed coaches who have been triggered in a session and not been able to control their emotions or behavior because they have not become fully aware of what triggers them.

Another supervisor observed, many new coaches “do not always either have the time or the muscle built for reflexivity. It’s almost like it’s a new skill to some of them, and that affects their capacity to bring topics to supervision and to know how to use supervision well, just as coaching clients have to learn to use coaching well” (Coach 2). A supervisor is an important professional development tool that can help a coach “awaken their own internal supervisor” as one of the supervisors said. Many of the coaches have worked with a supervisor in the past, currently work with one, or plan to.

Deepening Coaching Presence

Presence is the state that allows us to be the most resourceful, resilient, and self-generative person we can be, and that this is, in fact, part of the promise of coaching. — Doug Silsbee

In the coaching literature, presence has been described as “unconditional acceptance” that requires “listening with the whole self in order to reflect full acceptance and celebration of the client expression simply by the engagement of our curiosity in the field we are creating together.” (Harvey, 2015, p. 2). Presence is also referred to as being in the present moment and holding the space for the client to make transformation (Hargrove, 1995). At the heart of fostering a positive relationship between coach and client, coaching presence is intertwined with compassion and empathic intimacy (Wasylyshyn, 2014).

Presence is also an ICF competency, so this finding was not a surprise among the ICF credentialed coaches. ICF defines presence as, “being fully conscious and creating spontaneous relationships with clients, employing a style that is open, flexible, and confident” (ICF, 2018c).

However, the presence theme also surfaced among non-ICF coaches and supervisors. This finding can also be attributed to the field of psychology’s influence from Carl Roger’s notion of a way of being. As previously mentioned, Rogers’ (1957) qualities of presence include: empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard. Coaches described presence similar to both of these definitions. Research on expertise has also indicated the significance of presence for learning processes and performance (Waitzkin, 2008). Presence has also been studied as a significant factor in quality relationships in psychotherapeutic (Colosimo & Pos, 2015; Geller, Greenberg, & Watson, 2010) and executive leadership (Dagley & Gaskin, 2014; Macaux, 2014) settings.

Why was developing presence so important among the coaches? Coaches viewed presence as a significant part of the relationship, again in line with ICF’s core competencies and the coaching literature. Coaches recognized that they are in service to the client and they need to be able to recognize what’s going on in the moment in the relationship. Presence is viewed as an important element in building a positive relationship between coach and client. Participants believed that coach and supervisor are instruments of work through presence. As one coach put it, professional development is about “changing how we show up and deepening how we show up so that our presence and our capacity to hold the space for others is more powerful” (Coach 2).

When reflecting on their professional development journey, coaches referred to a shift in their coaching presence. Presence was described as the authentic self that tended to hide in the beginning of a coach’s journey. In the beginning, their being was contrived because their presence was centered on themselves. As coaches deepened their belief in the process and the client their presence became more client-centered. As previously mentioned, in the beginning stages, coaches were caught up in getting the coaching session just right by asking the most powerful question or saying the right thing at the right time. Coaches talked about how in the beginning they had to work on getting their own self out of the way in order to show up to a session with a fully engaged coaching presence.

Through reflective practice, participants talked about how they were able to make a shift from coach-aware to client focused to deepen their coaching presence. Coaching presence deepened as coaches gained more confidence and started to trust the coaching process and the coach-client relationship. When coaches started to truly believe in their self and that coaching works, their presence became more authentic. Coaches described their client-centered presence as:

“I just listen” (Coach F).

“I monitor my own reactions; I make sure there are no voices distorting my mind” (Coach I).

“I show up with a zen mind; I try to have nothing on my mind...I tune in to the person and pick up on the subtle things. Like I can smell the pheromones of the other person or sense when they are sweating or when their heart is beating faster” (Coach I).

How do these coaches enhance their presence? Through life experiences, for one. Presence became a way of being in the everyday—inside and outside coaching sessions. For many coaches, life experiences were viewed as learning opportunities connected to their presence. They have used their everyday life

experiences, such as going to a yoga class for personal interest, as a presence practice. They are out there observing. One coach described this continuous learning through life experiences as doing ethnography. By observing the everyday, the right now moment, they are seeing presence through a different lens. As one expert coach said, “every day is a training ground for how I’m being present and what I’m being present to and how that affects my questions, my listening, what I say to people, what I don’t say” (Coach E). Simply put, Coach E stated: “My whole life is a training ground.”

Taking Care of Self

Many coaches talked about the importance of taking care of their self in order to stay fit for purpose. Coaches recognized that self-care was an important part of their ongoing professional development. Taking care of self was viewed as a way to ensure the coach was at their best. Having a healthy self meant having more capacity to be there for the client. From this perspective, a coach needs to stay in shape to help other people stay in shape, be that mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

Coaches identified various forms of self-care to stay fit, figuratively and literally. Physical exercise and meditation were the most popular activities among coaches. Getting out into nature was also mentioned by some of the coaches. Many coaches have done counseling or psychotherapy as part of their self-care. As one supervisor stressed, “the value and importance of non-coaching personal and professional development for coaches [is key], such as regular exercise, tai chi, meditation, yoga (for physical, mental, spiritual well-being), psychotherapy, group process experience (for emotional well-being and support)” (Coach W).

Self-care requires time. Many coaches intentionally and routinely set aside time for taking care of self. One coach talked about how he has an appointment in the morning for 60 minutes every day with himself. He protects this scheduled time for himself because he knows it will help him be at his best and be able to give his entire self to his clients for the rest of the day. Other coaches talked about managing their calendar as a way to coach when they are at their best. This means scheduling appointments during the time of day when they are at their sharpest and avoiding times at which they do not function as well. Some even scheduled a few minutes into their calendar between each session so they could have time to transition and be ready and fully available for their next client.

Supervisors also talked about the importance of self-care when it comes to being an effective coach. Self-care was considered as a way to regenerate the mind, body, and spirit. This represents the coaching perspective that a coach is an instrument of practice (Bachkirova, 2016), so if the mind, body, and spirit are depleted or out of tune with the self then the coach as instrument will not be able to deliver a full presence to the client. By engaging in professional development activities, such as reflective practice and self-care, a coach is able to sharpen all their senses in order to tune into the energy vibrations of the client. “This means as coach ‘I am an instrument’ where I am available to the client’s intensity, intentionality, emotionality, tones, etc.” (Coach B).

The way coaches described self-care was very much intertwined with the reflective practice and presence themes. Taking care of self requires a reflective practice to know what works for the self. This requires coaches looking at their own skillset and looking at what else they can do to grow and to develop both as a person and as a coach. Taking care of self also means coaches are aware of their passion and are coaching in areas that align with that passion. In this sense, coaches were cognizant of their preferences, coaching style, and their ideal client.

Taken together, the themes represent how the professional development of coaches is an active, dynamic, and emergent process. Table 1 provides a summary of many aspects of coaching and how these aspects might show up in coaching sessions for novice and expert-level coaches.

Table 1.
Novice and Expert-level Coaching Comparison

Aspect of Coaching	Novice	Expert
Relationship	Rigid	Fluid
Presence	Coach-centered	Client-centered
Being	Contrived	Authentic
Confidence	Hesitant	Purposeful
Self-Awareness	Low	High
Vulnerability	Masked grandiosity	Humility
Knowledge & Techniques Application	Model rigidity	Model fluidity
Style	Fixed	Tailored
Trust in	Shallow	Deep
Process & Relationship		
Education & Training	Credential focused	Continuous focused
Learning Mindset	Performance-based	Learning-based
Development	Skills	Mind, Body, Spirit
	Theory, Knowledge	Theory, Knowledge

Staying Fit for Purpose: Supply-Demand-Need

As described above, one of the strongest themes to arise from the interviews was the idea of continuous learning. Because of this, there is significant demand for continued coach education and training. It may be useful to compare this demand, or desire, with the offerings available to coaches (supply) in order to identify possible gaps that training programs could fill. Taken a step further, one could ask the question, “What are the training needs to assist coaches in their quest for expertise?” It is through this triadic lens that we assess the continuing coach education and training market.

In the context of this study, supply is the set of professional development opportunities available to coaches. Demand is the set of professional development activities that coaches are taking and desiring. Need represents the professional development that coaches should be doing in order to advance on the journey towards expertise.

Supply

A multitude of higher education institutions, training companies, and professional bodies offer coaching education and training. The marketplace is significantly fragmented and difficult to assess. ICF, the largest professional coaching organization, accredits Continuing Coach Education (CCE) and their database was utilized for an overview of this element of the supply-demand-need triumvirate. While this may limit the generalizability of the conclusion, the method is very likely capturing the bulk of the industry.

Continuing coach education is delivered through ICF local chapters, approved training providers, regional and global conferences and events, and online webinars. In 2017, ICF approved approximately 695 program events for CCE. The programs were offered by approximately 464 organizations in 51 countries. Out of the 16,839 hours of programming, 68% of the hours counted toward ICF Core Competencies (ICF, 2018c) and the remaining hours counted toward as ICF resource development credit, a broad category of coaching-related training. The programming covered a wide range of topics, from the ICF Core Competencies, to tools and techniques, and other specialty areas, such as energy work, team coaching, personality type, neuroscience, and moods and emotions. The formats offered included

certification, conferences, retreats, skills-based training, and knowledge-based training. Learning events were offered in-person, through distance learning platforms, or a combination of both.

Offerings geared towards mentor coaching and supervision are on supply for advance training. A range of offerings are directed at expertise, such as energy mastery, mastery in core competencies, leadership mastery, and mastery intensive to name a few.

Demand

Each year ICF conducts a professional development survey of members to understand their development interests. Their latest study, the 2017 ICF Professional Development Survey (ICF, 2017) was used for this research. The survey results for virtual events indicated that the coaches were most interested in live webinars, on-demand sessions, and subject matter expert question and answer sessions.

The top five business development topics of interest to respondents included measuring the ROI of coaching, understanding the minds and motivations of coaching consumers, building a coaching culture, articulating the benefits of coaching, and personal branding. The top five coaching practices topics of interest to respondents included, executive and leadership coaching, team coaching, powerful questioning, coach skills in various contexts, and mentor coaching. The top three science topics of interest to respondents included neuroscience, emotional intelligence, and positive psychology. The top five emerging topics of interest to respondents included how coaching impacts change management, coaching millennials and generation z, how can coaching influence social change, women as leaders/gender gap, and collective intelligence.

In other findings from the 2017 ICF Professional Development Survey (ICF, 2017), the majority of ICF coaches indicated they need the following tools to support their practice: assessment tools (60%), marketing services and tools (59%), and templates for client relationships (56%) (n=1,300). From the open-ended comments, a theme of a desire for advanced training emerged. Thus, it seems that for this small group of coaches, available trainings did not adequately address their training needs as advanced-level coaches. External feedback opportunities, such as mentoring, peer groups, and supervision, was another theme identified as a professional development desire for many of the respondents.

Part of the professional development demand is driven by credential requirements set forth by ICF. In order to maintain their ICF credential, a coach must earn a minimum number of CCEUs during a specified time period. All renewing credential-holders are required to earn forty hours of CCEUs over a three-year period (ICF, 2018b). Of the forty hours, at least twenty-one units must be in Core Competencies, at least three units must be in coaching ethics, and the remaining hours can be in resource development. Resource development training is discretionary and includes learning opportunities considered personal, professional, and business development. For ACC-level coaches, 10 hours of their Core Competencies requirement must be in mentor coaching.

Needs

As stated previously, it is important to consider what coaches need to maintain effective coaching and progress toward expertise. In other words, what do coaches need in order to create the conditions to facilitate learning, growth, and development for their client? A learning need can be viewed from multiple perspectives. One way to view need is to look to expert opinion and advice on what the field needs. Finally, accounting for the changing context of coaching (i.e. changing demands of clients and changing educational technologies) is also important when considering needs. Identifying needs helps to understand the gaps in knowledge and skills to be an effective coach. Professional development can be used to help fulfill these needs.

Two sources for expert opinion and advice on needs include coaching associations and the coaching literature on professional development. While the field has not reached a consensus on the core

competencies for coaching, several of the leading coaching associations have put forth a set of competencies for their members. Many of the competencies focus on ethics, agreements, relationship, communicating, provoking awareness, and facilitating learning (Association for Coaching (AC), 2012; European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), 2015; International Association of Coaching (IAC), n.d.; International Coach Federation (ICF), n.d.; Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC), 2007). Some include elements of self-development (Association for Coaching (AC), 2012; European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), 2015; Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC), 2007), organizational context (Association for Coaching (AC), 2012; Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC), 2007), and assessment (Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC), 2007). Looking at these different sets of competencies reveals some overlap, or agreement. Any gaps in one of these competency areas suggests a professional development need for coaches.

When looking to the coaching literature for insights on professional development, the field tends to focus on the types of coaching practices that lead to positive client outcomes in order to identify factors for effective coaching (e.g. quality of the relationship between coach and client) (Bluckert, 2005; Kilburg, 1996; Wasylyshyn, 2003). From outcomes research, some scholars have made recommendations on what coaches should work on for developing their coaching practice. For example, Ianior & Kauffeld (2014) recommended that coaches develop their awareness of their own affective states and interpersonal behaviors through training and supervision in order to create a strong working relationship with clients.

Other practitioner-scholars have theorized on coach education and made arguments for coach specific education. For example, Bachkirova and colleagues (Bachkirova, Jackson, Gannon, Iordanou, & Myers, 2017) have proposed coach education based on a pragmatist and constructivist philosophy. The practitioners focused on specific skills or states for coach development, including critical thinking, critical reflection, congruence, flexibility, and ethical consciousness. Some of these scholars also have advocated for university education that is coaching specific for coach education and development (Bachkirova, 2016). This perspective maintains that in order to be a profession, the field must have identifiable and distinct skills, formalized curriculum and professional education, defined theory and methods, code of ethics, quality assurance through evaluation, reflective professional competence, professional body, and public recognition (Lane, Stelter, & Stout-Rostron, 2014).

Another perspective on professional development views the coach as an instrument of practice. Coach as instrument means using the self as a tool for facilitating learning and growth for the client. Finely-tuning the instrument means developing the self. For Bachkirova (2016), developing the self means: understanding one's self, taking care of one's self, and checking the quality of one's self. Awareness, according to Bachkirova, is key to knowing how the self as a tool works, how to maintain the self, and how to adjust the instrument. Kennedy (2015) assessed a coach training methodology (integral development) which utilized a learning approach for interpreting experiences and understanding a coach's own way of being and what their way of being enables and inhibits. The conclusion from this study was that integral development training had a qualitative impact on a coach's empowered experience, embodied presence, empathic connections, and as a more adaptive and responsive instrument.

Bennett & Rogers (2011) compared skill acquisition and expertise development experiences between beginner and expert executive coaches. The findings indicated that coaching skills were similar but expressed in different ways at the different coaching levels. Specifically, self-awareness and client-centered focus increased with skill level. Also, coaching presence appeared more confident and coaching role was clearer for the more skilled coaches. The findings also indicated that expert-level coaches sought out knowledge and experience in distinct ways. Expert coaches engaged in continual experimentation and reflection while beginner coaches turned to compassionate thought partners for learning. At the expert level, coaches were the teachers, which is also a way of learning, demonstrating the skill progression towards expertise.

When looking at the changing context for coaching, market research has identified five key trends in the personal development industry, including shifting consumer demographics from baby boomers to millennials, increasing role of Internet for delivering services, coaching becoming a fast-growing industry

worldwide, increasing demand for convenience, and increasing demand for credentialed coaches (LaRosa, 2018). This means that coaches need to be in tune with emerging trends in order to stay relevant in the industry. For example, some coaches may need to identify professional development opportunities that can help them with shifting technology, including the Internet, podcasts, online courses, tele-summits, audio downloads, smartphone and computer applications, websites, mastermind groups, phone coaching, and webinars. Engaging in the world through a lifelong learning lens means staying relevant in the field.

The major gap between supply, demand, and need is in reflective practice – the supply pipeline is limited in reflective practice offerings, coaches are not demanding reflective practice as a training, yet reflective practice is identified as an important need for effective coaching. This could partially be a function of reflective practice not being an ICF core competency. The industry should consider reflective practice as a competency and how much emphasis to put on reflective practice as a professional development activity.

Conclusion

Professional development is a way to broaden a coach's perspective. The descriptions offered by the participants in this study have helped to paint a picture of the coaching and professional development journey. A journey of practice that involves lifelong learning, modeling the way, and deepening belief in the process is one part of professional development for coaches. A reflective practice that involves deepening presence and taking care of self is another part of staying fit for purpose.

What does the journey of coaching look like? In the beginning of their practice, coaches were stuck in their head—they were focused on asking the right question and getting the right answer. Coaches tended to lack confidence in themselves when starting out in their practice. Coaching sessions felt clunky and rigid as an inexperienced coach tried to remember how to work their model. They wanted to make sure to properly follow the model they were trained in. As coaches gained more experience through coaching, their confidence increased. Practice was not enough, though. Through reflective practice, coaches became more aware of themselves. This self-awareness helped them tune into their client. With confidence and self-awareness presence developed. A more confident coach emerged. As a coach started to believe in the process and in the client more, they were able to go into a session and be more direct, allow more silence, say less, listen more, and challenge the client. The framework and models a coach used became tools they take out at the appropriate time.

Through professional development opportunities, coaches tried out new models and gained new perspectives. Some worked, some did not work. As part of deliberate practice, professional development is a way to activate critical reflection and thinking. Along the way, a coach experienced “aha” moments.

A challenge for curriculum developers is to offer a diverse array of opportunities for coach development that meet the needs of coaches at various levels of involvement and skill. This research provides some insight into the various ways coaches have stayed fit for purpose along their coaching journey. The findings indicate patterns in professional development that have been the most effective for participants. Future research can investigate the relationship between professional development activities and coaching outcomes, i.e. are those coaches who engage in reflective practice more effective than coaches who do not include this approach into their development?

Development Strategies for Coaches

The journey to expertise requires a commitment to continuous professional and personal development. Continuous development comes in a variety of forms. Based on the findings, coaches should consider engaging in five key development strategies for continuous learning: a robust reflective practice, external feedback, learning network, field contribution, and experimentation.

Develop Robust Reflective Practice

The findings indicated that reflective practice is a key component for staying fit for purpose – even at the expert-level. A robust reflective practice is an integrated skillset that includes: reflection, awareness, and self-regulation. Reflective practice provides both novice and expert coaches alike insight to understand their own patterns of interactions, triggers and behavioral patterns, and how they impact others in order to moderate behavior. These skills can improve judgment, deepen a way of being (presence), and help identify areas for growth and development.

How can a coach implement a reflective practice as part of their professional development? First, a coach should set aside time to engage in activities that foster critical reflection, awareness, and regulation. Breathing, meditation, and mindfulness practices outside of coaching are ways to deepen a reflective practice (Silsbee, 2010). Finding the right space—one that is comfortable with no external distractions—is also helpful for breathing, meditation, and mindfulness activities.

Other activities that can enhance reflective practice include self-observation exercises, such as journaling and reviewing recordings of sessions (Silsbee, 2010). Using self and peer assessments is another way coaches can reflect on their own and others' coaching. Other tools for enhancing critical reflection include: storytelling, reflective and reflexive conversations, reflective metaphors, critical incident analysis, reflective journals, repertory grids and concept mapping (Gray, 2007). The point is to fully engage in an experience or build on previous experiences by activating thinking, articulating assumptions, and taking time for critical reflection (Cranton, 2002; Densten & Gray, 2001). Fostering critical reflection is part of a well-rounded professional development plan.

Transformative learning takes place when coaches critically examine their practice and develop alternative perspectives of understanding their practice. Through reflective practice, awareness in personal learning style becomes important to professional development. In this sense, professional development is a way to increase awareness of a coach's assumptions along with the consequences of their coaching. Engaging in a reflective practice can help coaches to understand why they coach the way they do. Even expert-level coaches should be questioning the assumptions underlying their coaching practice for continuous learning and growing.

Seek out External Feedback

One of the principles of learning is through practice and feedback (Knowles, 1980). Our findings indicated that giving and receiving constructive feedback is an important part of learning. A robust reflective practice should include some type of external feedback to support and validate the internal appraisal process. External feedback is a strategy that should be emphasized in its own right.

Eurich (2017) suggests that seeking feedback is an intentional and deliberate process. First, seek out external feedback from a loving critic—someone who will be open and honest in a caring way (Eurich, 2017). This means finding the right mentor, peer, or supervisor to work with on professional and personal development. Working with a loving critic offers a sounding board and another perspective on a coach's interactive process. Sitting in dialogue with a mentor, peer, or supervisor provides a safe and trusting space to review sessions and to learn from the experience in order to inform the next one.

Clients can also be a source for feedback. As Kilburg (1996) points out, evaluation and attribution of coaching success or failure is an important component of coaching. Together, coach and client can assess each of the coaching sessions together, periodically looking back over what has been achieved, what worked, and what did not work (Kilburg, 1996).

External feedback is not only important to the novice coach but also to the expert coach. Advanced level coaches can benefit from the learning feedback loop by giving feedback to different level coaches. Expert coaches can enhance their learning experiences when working with novices.

External feedback provides coaches a mirror in which they can see their own practices—a way to encourage coaches to stand back and reflect on the construction and application of their professional knowledge.

Build a Learning Network

Gray (2006) suggests that a dynamic coaching network allows for coaches with different professional perspectives to come together to share knowledge, offer mutual support, and develop their professional practice. While feedback may be part of a learning network, the network also serves as a support system. Many of the coaches talked about how the job can be lonely. A learning network can be a source of comfort. A group setting fosters collective intelligence, empowering individuals to learn from each other and grow.

Building a learning network may require initiative to set up and coordinate, as well as a collaborative mindset. The goal is to get together with others who share in a similar area of interest. First, identify an

area of interest for learning to narrow down the vast number of options. Then, find the professionals in your interest area, such as organizations, published authors, researchers, or speakers. Join these organizations, get on their email lists, attend their conferences, follow them on social media, find their blog, and set up an RSS feed for new content notifications. Along with the professionals, find a niche group or online community with similar passions or experiences—on a personal or professional level. The point is to connect to others. For in-person interactions, Meetup groups are another way to connect to a niche.

Through technology, learning networks have a global reach so individuals can interact with others with similar interests across the globe. Virtually connect by participating in regular Twitter chats, following social media boards for great ideas, or subscribing to YouTube channels.

Contribute to the Field

As a coach advances on their journey, space opens up to give back to the field. This means taking on a leadership role, volunteering for a local member association chapter, teaching, researching, writing, developing tools for other coaches, mentoring, or supervising. Being a thought leader in the coaching community is not only a way to help the field grow but also a professional development opportunity for advanced-level coaches. Joining a member association is one way to access the field and interact with other coaches. For example, ICF provides members with opportunities and resources to get involved as a leader, such as their volunteer leaders training and Twitter Ambassador program along with writing for their Coaching World blog.

Be an informer (Eurich, 2017). Share information via social media, such as Twitter. Be an active participant. Invite and engage others. Create a website or blog to share experiences with others.

Experiment in Learning

Bennett & Rogers (2011) find that expert coaches seek knowledge and experience in ways distinct from beginner coaches. One of the unique ways expert coaches acquire their skills and abilities is by experimenting. The expert's approach to professional development stands out from the beginner in that "the expert is evolving by experimenting and reflecting on knowledge and experience to date." (p. 24).

This means, like their client, a coach should be curious. Observe what is happening in the everyday world. Explore different topics. Be inquisitive. Experiment. Try out new things. Try different learning tactics.

Some options to consider for continuous learning include: reading magazines and online articles; analyzing and critiquing case studies; subscribing to publications in your areas of interest; listening to podcasts; watching TED Talk videos; connecting to a global network of people using social media, Skype, and email; attending training courses and events; and joining an association or group related to your areas of interest.

Developments in neuroscience (Ramscar, Hendrix, Shaoul, Milin, & Baayen 2014) have debunked the idiom "you can't teach an older dog new tricks," meaning once a person reaches a certain age, they are no longer able to learn new things. Instead, neuroscience tells us that the neural pathways can be rewired to see the world from a different perspective (Taylor, 2006). Research also shows that the more experienced and successful people are, the more blind spots, or unconscious biases, they develop and the less likely they are to question their practices (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010; Chase & Simon, 1973). This suggests that even advanced-level, expert coaches have something to learn. Professional development, i.e. learning and reflective practice, is for everyone.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is that the findings may not generalize to the majority of coaches since the coach sample was not taken randomly from the population of coaches. Instead, a qualitative approach of inquiry with a convenience sample of coaches allowed for greater detail in responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

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