C.O.A.C.H: A cross-national study of coach training for teachers across 5 countries

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study is to examine stakeholder perceptions of coaching principles and practice within a coach training programme with experienced teachers across 5 countries. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with professionals working with fellow teachers undergoing coach training. The aim of the interviews was to collect perceptions of those who work with coach trainees, in terms of changes in their practice and attitude. In addition, a survey was administered to those teachers undergoing coach training to elicit self-reported ideas of competency and relevance of the competence details within the ICF guidelines. The outcomes of the study imply that coach training can achieve early and rapid improvements to practice, with wider positive effects within schools. The procedural aspects of coaching were more easily achieved and practised by trainees. Those aspects which required higher-order practices or changes in attitude and beliefs were less readily adopted and were often seen as less important to coaching practice. However, there is reason for optimism in that those attributes that are recognised as important are reported as being achieved at higher levels and there appears to be potential for a pedagogical approach to the development of coaching competencies.

Keywords

School Coaching; Coach Training; National Comparison; Novice Coach; Evaluation

Practice points

- This paper is relevant to coaching practitioners, coaching trainers or those implementing coaching in schools.
- This paper contributes by identifying the aspects of coaching practice which novice coaches find challenging to put into practice. It highlights a nuance between procedural and attitudinal aspects of coaching and the consequences of that for practice and coaching development.
- Practitioners can use the following findings for implementing coaching, developing training and evaluating progress
    - Coaching can have rapid and significant effects on school culture.
    - The procedural aspects of coaching are readily and easily adopted and implemented. This should be considered when evaluating progress of novice coaches.
    - Attitudinal aspects of coaching are more difficult to engender. However, these changes can be stimulated through appropriate and targeted pedagogy.

Introduction

Recent years have seen a great increase in the popularity of coaching, which ranges from life coaching through leadership coaching, to sports coaching and coaching in school settings. Within this field, the industry of coaching has become increasingly professionalised with various accrediting bodies, supported by training organisations and university-based routes. The rapid expansion of the field has required that the profession develops methods of self-regulation and accreditation, and there have been attempts at unification or at least consensus of principles and practices with accrediting bodies such as ICF, AC or EMCC[1] (Lane 2010).

Despite this widespread demand for professional coaching within commerce and industry, there is still some lack of consensus regarding the definitions and outcomes of coaching. Professional bodies and academics have worked towards producing clear definitions of practices or outcomes, yet these have an element of self-reference, measured only in positive outcomes (ICF, 2017; EMCC, 2013; Whitmore, 2009). The issue of this is that any attempts to evaluate the benefits of coaching are by definition, guaranteed to produce positive results as only positive outcomes are regarded as 'coaching'. This is also true for coaching in the field of education.

The rapid growth in the sector has meant that the field faces the challenge of establishing a sound theoretical and empirical basis for practice, to establish the rigour and validity of the discipline. As the profession begins to become formalised and regulated, support for the validity and rigour of coaching as a practice needs to be established so that coaching as a strategic tool can be recognised as distinct from other similar disciplines or therapies. Within this, the scope and limits of the remit of coaching practices should be established

[1] ICF: international coach federation; AC: Association for coaching; EMCC: European Mentoring and Coaching Council)

and optimistic claims for the benefits and advantages of coaching need to be tempered by some empirical data, which goes beyond self-reports of satisfaction. In the field of education, many of the conceptualisations and applications of coaching emerged from the field of business or leadership and management; and definitions of coaching vary across sectors, practices and different national and cultural contexts (Lofthouse, 2019). Research in this disparate field most often builds on case studies and examples of coaching in specific contexts. As such, wider evidence for the effectiveness of coaching remains insufficient (Lofthouse, 2019). Despite the potential for looking at coaching across cultures and contexts (e.g. professional, national or experiential), few studies look at the practices and competencies of coaching from a cross-national perspective (Aas and Fluckinger, 2016).

This article aims to address some of these challenges and to contribute to research on coaching and education by addressing two areas: (1) to look at the principles of coaching from an international perspective which includes collaborative research between 5 European countries; (2) to elicit teacher self-reported ideas of competency and relevance of the competencies details within the ICF guidelines. It is hoped that the research and analysis in this paper will help deepen reflection on the principles of coaching and their implementation in practice.

Literature Review

As a relatively new field, coaching in education comes in different forms and interpretations. Coaching is implemented at many levels of education and encompasses students, teachers, school leaders, as well as parents and members of the wider community (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012:4). Research in the field has looked at different dimensions of coaching, united by the idea that coaching can help improve learning and professional practice in many ways. Whilst coaching has gained popularity in the field of leadership and management in education (Passmore, 2010; Aas and Fluckinger, 2016; Anthony and van Niewerburgh, 2018) and has increasingly been integrated within educational policy in the UK and the US (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012; Lofthouse, 2019), there has been limited systematic research on the impact of coaching in education. A number of studies have shown some evidence of the positive impact of coaching on student achievement and student engagement, as well as attitudes to learning (van Niewerburg, 2012; Lech, van Nieuwerburgh and Jalloul, 2008). Coaching has also been endorsed as an area of continued professional development (CPD) for teachers, through various routes which range from consultancy to school-led coaching programmes (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; van Nieuwerburgh, 2012; Lofthouse & Hall, 2014). Most prominent in the US, UK and Australia, coaching practices for CPD have also gained prominence in other national contexts, such as China (Bai, Song and Zhang, 2018), Norway (Aas and Fluckinger, 2016) or Qatar (Chaaban & Abu-Tineh, 2017), to name a few . One of the appeals of coaching for teacher professional development is its flexibility, which allows it to respond to the differing needs and aims of education professionals (Kennedy, 2014). This flexibility allows the development of dialogue and forms of collaboration that promote teachers' self-efficacy (Lofthouse, 2019) and contribute to what Hargreaves and O'Connor term 'collaborative professionalism' (2018). These dialogues, collaborations and partnerships rely in great part on relationships of mutual trust, enabling opportunities for co-construction between coaches and coachees (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012; Lofthouse, 2019).

Whilst research has shown that teachers hold positive views on the benefits of coaching as part of their CPD, the context in which coaching takes place can impede its success, in particular in school environments in which the wider professional culture might be at odds with the values and principles of coaching; for example through an emphasis on performativity and accountability at the cost of professional dialogue and relational coaching (Lofthouse and Hall, 2014). These tensions highlight the importance of further clarifying definitions of coaching as CPD practice within the field of education, and of building solid theoretical insights that go beyond skills and experiences. Part of this work entails a reflection on frameworks and competencies to evaluate and interpret coaching. This is not straightforward as the many definitions and practices of coaching are reflected in multiple professional bodies and accreditations (e.g. ICF, AC, EMCC) and in a wide range of frameworks or tools used to examine coaching practices for teachers. For example, Lofthouse & Hall (2014) suggest Coaching Dimensions as a tool for (self-)evaluating professional dialogue in the context of coaching whilst van Nieuwerburgh & Campbell (2015) suggest a 'Global Framework for Mentoring and Coaching in Education'. This article hopes to contribute to the field by examining the ICF competencies of coaching through teachers' self-assessment and the reported effect of coach training for teachers on the wider school community.

There is no clear evidence base which underlies the pedagogical or theoretical basis for coaching and whilst there is evidence that coaching produces some clear positive outcomes (Passmore & Brown, 2009; Gormley & van Nieuwerburgh, 2014; Lord, Atkinson & Mitchell, 2008), most supporting evidence within training literature and practice appears to borrow from a range of other disciplines in a 'pot-pourri' of theory, some of which is uncritical or at least questionable (Karin Askeland, 2009); e.g. the learning styles myth (Kirschner, 2017), or the positioning of the coach as 'neutral' in a context which many would see as socially constructed. For example, ICF Competencies 4.7. and 5.1 respectively, demand that the coach '*Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client's emotions'* and *'Attends to the client and the client's agenda and not to the coach's agenda for the client*'. This may be in part due to the fact that many practicing coaches and coach trainers arrived at their positions through diverse professional routes and coaching in itself is actually a multi-disciplinary profession (Bachkirova & Kauffman, 2008, Grant & Cavanagh 2004). Furthermore, perhaps because of the rapid development of the field, in commercial competitive environments, the focus is on 'what works' rather than how and why. This is not to be dismissed. However, despite some significant work and research in the field, there is still a need to establish the credibility of coaching as an academic and professional discipline, through clearer academic support, both empirical and theoretical.

This article aims to contribute to academic research on coaching in education, by examining the principles of coaching (as defined by ICF) from an international perspective, and by eliciting teachers' self-reported ideas of competency and the relevance of the competencies detailed within the ICF guidelines.

Research Methodology

This article reports findings from a research project on coach training, set as a collaboration between 5 European countries. The 'Coaching schOols to fAce Change aHead' (C.O.A.C.H.) was an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships funded project which delivered a blended learning course of coach training in education for 100 teachers across 5 European countries (Italy [IT], Lithuania [LT], Norway [NO], Romania [RO] and Turkey [TR]). The main objective of the programme was to provide professional development to teachers, to support them in gaining new perspectives on personal challenges, develop decision-making skills, interpersonal effectiveness and confidence as part of the development and acquisition of a set of core competencies which would enable them to become an International Coaching Federation (ICF) certified coach.

20 volunteer teachers were recruited from each of the participating countries, resulting in a cohort of 100 trainees. The teachers all worked in the full range of the educational sector from kindergarten to University, teaching a diverse range of subjects. All were experienced teachers, though the extent of that experience varied from less than 5 years to well above 20 years.

The trainees were inducted into a condensed coach training programme delivered by a well-established coaching and coach training organisation and followed a training programme aligned with the ICF Credentialing requirements, such that after the C.O.A.C.H training programme, many of the participants went on to complete some extra modules to achieve ICF Associate Certified Coach (ACC) status.

The training programme was delivered through a blended approach, using on-line learning materials, webinars, work-based learning and reflection as well as a set of 2 five-day, face-to-face courses of delivery and supervision. The programme consisted of 130 hours of delivery (80 face to face hours and 50 online), supported by national coaches with previous ICF coaching credentials.

This study adopted a quasi-mixed design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006), which included interviews with key stakeholders and self-assessment questionnaires with participants in the program. The study involved a series of interviews framed within a three-tiered approach designed to elicit data from stakeholders at different levels within the school hierarchy. It consisted of staff who were peers of the coach trainees, those at the next level, responsible for the training of the staff and, finally, those at senior level with operational responsibility for schools such as headteachers and principals. This qualitative approach gave insights into the experiences of stakeholders involved with the C.O.A.C.H. programme. At the level of peers, the moderate samples allowed some preliminary inferences to be made regarding comparisons of notions of teacher quality at national level. These interviews were complemented by self-assessment questionnaires administered at individual level, to all the participants in the programme. The questionnaires were framed within the competencies of the International Coaching Federation (ICF). The data collected through this approach was analysed quantitatively to allow conclusions to be drawn concerning the trainees' self-assessment of their own coaching competencies across each of the 4 clusters and concerning the strength and validity of the indicators of competency themselves. This quasi-mixed design allows data to be drawn from a variety of sources and combined if not

integrated in the development of the inferences of the study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). This approach was particularly suitable for the aims of this research. One strand looks to understand the experiences of those involved with the C.O.A.C.H. trainees and the effect that the C.O.A.C.H training has had on their daily and institutional practice. The other strand looks to draw inferences from the indicators of coaching competence as prescribed by the ICF and to make sense of the patterns of responses, both within and across countries as well as within the strands of the competencies themselves. This data is not integrated but they do augment each other in providing an overall picture of the principles and competencies of coach training, for the individual and for the institution in which they are situated.

Data was collected from research informants within a 6-week window commencing 5 months after the first stage of face-to-face training. This design was implemented so that C.O.A.C.H. trainees had had sufficient opportunity to practise their coaching skills in realistic environments. It also enabled stakeholders to be able to reflect on the importance of key aspects of the training programme in terms of their effect and relevance to teaching practice.

Data collection consisted of two main programmes. The first programme involved the development of a suite of interview protocols to collect data from the C.O.A.C.H. trainees' colleagues, training mentors and principals or head teachers. They were selected as people who worked closely with the trainees, either in the same school, year group or class and with a different relationships and responsibilities for the trainees, within the hierarchy of the institution.

The second was a self-evaluation questionnaire, which mirrored the Coaching Competencies as defined by the International Coaching Federation (ICF). These were categorised by the indicators associated with the Foundations of Coaching, Co-Creating the Coaching Relationship, Communication and Learning and Achievements. The questionnaire took the form of 5-point Likert scales (Strongly Agree [4], Agree [3], Neither Agree nor Disagree [2], Disagree [1], Strongly Disagree [0]). ICF competencies were constructed as statements and trainees were asked to respond in two ways; firstly; to rate the extent to which they agreed with the statement of competency and secondly to reflect the extent to which they felt that the competency was important to their practice. The questionnaire was administered online and translated into national languages in each of the participating countries. Careful attention was paid to issues of translation, both in terms of linguistic and conceptual equivalence.

Interviews

The purpose of the research was to shed some light on the C.O.A.C.H training programme, its participants, their national context and the impact of the programme on individuals, colleagues and the whole school. It explored perceptions of good teaching, collegiality and leadership potential.

The data represents responses from informants in all participating countries. It relates to trainees with varying professional experience and general themes are extracted rather than making claims about individual cases. The interview questions were designed to elicit ideas about teaching quality and leadership potential. The questions for each cohort of trainees'

colleagues, training mentors and principals were broadly in parallel, drawing ideas from different levels within the organisations in which the trainees were practicing.

Colleagues taught in the same school and year group as the trainees, often teaching the same class and subject discipline. One colleague was asked to comment on each of the trainees and in some cases, colleagues commented on more than one trainee. However, the data represents one colleague interview for each trainee. The range of experience of the colleagues was very wide, although almost all were very experienced teachers with between 10 and 30 years of practice. Respondents taught across a diverse range of subject areas and age groups, from kindergarten up to university. This reflects the range of trainees involved in the C.O.A.C.H programme. Few of the respondents had teacher education or training experience, although a few had been involved through school-based training or within a role as teacher educators.

The training mentors were from a variety of backgrounds in schools with C.O.A.C.H trainees in a number of different contexts. All training mentors had previous experience of mentoring teachers, either colleagues or newly qualified teachers. Interviews were carried out with training mentors regarding 2 trainees in each country. This resulted in 10 training mentor interviews overall, although some respondents commented on more than one trainee each.

A total of 8 interviews were carried out with principals or head teachers as a part of this strand of research. This relates to 8 trainees across the 5 participating countries. In some cases, the same principal is interviewed more than once, as they were responsible for more than one trainee.

Some of the principals came from schools with as few as 20 teachers, others in schools with approaching 200 teachers. Some had up to 20 C.O.A.C.H. trainees within the school and others less than 5.

There is some cross-national analysis comparing between countries, where there is adequate data to make sensible comparisons. There is no attempt to generalise from the data here to a wider population, as such no inferential statistical analyses or hypotheses testing is used. The analysis treats the data collected only as ‘population’ data. The larger sets of self-evaluation data and colleague data (N=100, N=30) are treated at a granularity of national level. However, the data from training mentors and principals are treated ‘en-masse’ as the data sets for each country are too small for any meaningful comparative analysis.

Each of the interviews were carried out in the national language of the participants. The responses to each of the interview questions were documented in note form by the interviewer. For example, interviewees were asked to rate the level of a trainee’s subject knowledge on a scale from 1-10, following which they were asked to provide an example or evidence to support their rating. The interviewer would at this stage transcribe the key points which were made. These notes were taken in the national language of the interviewer and later translated for data analysis. In this respect, there is recognition that some detail or subtlety may have been lost in transcription and translation in both directions. Nevertheless, as can be seen below, the general sentiments regarding teacher attributes were able to be captured through this method.

Notes from interviews with participants were analysed following a thematic approach. Analysis began with a general overview of the data in order to develop a general sense of what participants had said. The data was then organised into overarching themes, with a progressive focus on more specific themes and sub-themes, identifying key themes for each country and each group of participants. The findings below summarise the main themes that emerged from the data in each country.

Self-Assessment-Questionnaires

A self-assessment questionnaire was administered to all participants who took part in the C.O.A.C.H. training programme. The questionnaire mirrored the Coaching Competencies as detailed by the ICF and were categorised as Foundations of Coaching, Co-Creating the Coaching Relationship, Communication and Learning and Achievements. Participants were asked to use a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) in response to items from the ICF Competencies, constructed as statements. They were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with the statement of competency, in terms of their coaching practice and to indicate the extent to which they felt that that competency was important in their practice.

The aim of this phase was to evaluate the self-reported coaching competences of the trainees, and to assess the extent to which trainees felt that the principles and competencies defined by the ICF were relevant and important to their coaching practice.

The questionnaire was translated into the national language of each of the participating countries and administered via an online survey application. Responses were numerical, within a Likert scale, thus eliminating any issues of fidelity in translation for analysis.

All participants in each country were encouraged to complete the self-assessment, although it was also made clear to them, in line with ethical guidelines, that their responses could be withdrawn from the research study at any stage, either during or after the term of the project.

Results

Interview Results

This analysis of the interviews within this paper looks at the responses of each category of informants, identifying some important themes and key messages, with particular regard to perceptions of ‘good teaching’, then summarises how the outcomes of the training programme relate to this. For the interviews with the colleagues of the C.O.A.C.H. trainees, each country is treated individually, describing the data and ideas which emerge in each national context. For Training Mentors and Principals, the analysis is not differentiated by country, instead the respondents from all countries are treated as a single cohort.

Interviews with trainees’ colleagues

From the interview data, it appears that almost all the trainees in the programme were regarded by their colleagues to be highly competent across a range of teaching skills. However, the examples of evidence for this competence varied across countries, perhaps reflecting national ideas about the nature of teaching and education. Emergent themes, albeit in small samples from this survey, highlighted some interesting differences

Notes from interviews were collated and reported by countries. Interview notes can thus not be attributed to specific trainees but offer an overview of the themes that emerged from the data in each country. The themes from each country are discussed briefly below, with the exception of Romania, which did not gather sufficient responses in that category.

Responses from the colleagues of Italian participants raised ideas of good relationships and connections between pupil and teacher. Pupil interaction and engagement were valued highly and activities involving teamwork and collaboration were often cited as good practice, through ideas such as '*positive and cooperative class atmosphere*' [IT1]; '*students are actively engaged in the lesson activities, use of tutoring and collaborative learning*' [IT2]; '*teamwork, tutoring, integration between weaker and stronger students'* [IT3]. A '*warm and engaging class environment, [which] facilitates the students' learning process'* [IT1], was seen as an ideal. (Interviews with Italian participants)

In Lithuania, again pupil engagement and involvement were highly valued. However, within these responses, there was an emphasis on differentiation and meeting the individual needs of students such as '*variety of methods, students' involvement*' [LT1]; '*student-focused approach, tailoring different learning methods to students' needs*' [LT1]. Planning and structure in classes and lessons were also emphasised as positive attributes within the feedback: '*Lessons are delivered according to the plan and modified to the current needs of the class*' [LT2]; '*Perfect planning: goals, objectives, time setting*' [LT2]. (Interviews with Lithuanian participants).

Pupil engagement and involvement was highly valued by Norwegian respondents. Here, the other main area of focus was the use of a variety of teaching approaches. Colleagues of the Norwegian trainees spoke high levels of teaching skill which included '*good relation with the pupils*' [NO1}; *'conversation with students*' [NO2]; '*engaged and structured*' [NO5]; '*well-structured classes, but flexible*' [NO4]; '*variation, communication, activity*' [NO6]; '*variation of web-based teaching resources and material, as well as books and magazines*' [NO6]; '*varies between lecturing and student activities*' [NO5]. (Interviews with Norwegian participants).

A student-centred approach, with pupil involvement and formative assessment was highly valued by the respondents in Turkey. Planning was also an aspect which was well regarded. Respondents spoke of their colleagues in positive terms, using phrases such as '*she plans her lessons before a day*' [TR2]; '*she prepares worksheets for students*' [TR2]; '*she clearly states the learning objectives on her lesson planning sheet and plans her lessons with considering each student's academic level*' [TR4]; '*she introduces learning path, focuses on each individual learning by doing techniques, cooperative learning approach*' [TR4]; '*observing student's progress and taking notes about their performance*' [TR2]. (Interviews with Turkish participants).

By collecting data 5 months after the first training course, respondents were allowed time to reflect upon progress made by the trainees, attributable to the C.O.A.C.H programme.

There is a risk that participating teachers are reluctant to reflect negatively on their colleagues and to some degree one might expect some inflation in the peer assessment of teaching quality. Nevertheless, the points of interest here are the examples given as evidence of that quality. This may not be as subject to bias as direct questions about colleagues and peers as it is less personalised.

Across all participating countries, participants reported slight but noticeable improvements in the attributes associated with 'good teaching' amongst their colleagues who took part in the programme. This improvement extended to classroom practice, professional practice and schoolwide impact. One of the key themes to emerge was that trainees' colleagues felt the trainees themselves had begun to put greater emphasis on 'student voice', empowering their students and valorising their opinion. These changes are well-aligned with the internationally shared values of engagement and involvement, identified earlier and with the key coaching skills of active listening and empowerment, as emphasised with the training programme.

Across all responding countries, the engagement and involvement of students in the learning process was cited as important. This close connection between teacher and pupil underpins much of the ideas of good practice across all countries involved in the research. However, it was the only common theme, each country also identified characteristic traits associated with being a good teacher.

All teachers in each country were generally seen by their colleagues to have good subject knowledge, probably attributable to the way in which teachers were selected. Interestingly the sources of evidence for good subject knowledge produced some noticeable variations across countries, In Lithuania for example, experience was seen to be an indicator, whilst in Norway, level of qualification was an oft-cited indicator.

Training Mentor Interviews

The evaluations of the trainees' training mentors were rather less positive than those of colleagues, in general scoring them about 2-3 marks lower, out of 10 for teaching quality although generally rating them highly for pedagogical understanding and classroom practice. Emergent themes were of well-structured and organised planning and calm and engaging delivery, typified by comments citing '*skilful and effective lesson planning*' [TM2], '*understanding of difference between plan and delivery*' [TM4] and '*She has well-organized and skilful teaching techniques*' [TM7]

Flexibility and student-centeredness were highly regarded and assessment practices that included effective, individualised feedback and constant monitoring were also commended. Comments such as '*strong capacity to establish an active engagement of the students*' [TM2]; '*using questioning techniques*' [TM8] and '*improved her attention to her student learning*' [TM2]; '*spotting and highlighting students learning styles*' [TM3]; '*constantly motivating them with precise feedback*' [TM2] aligned well with the well-established ideas of Formative Assessment (Black and Wiliam, 2009).

All the trainees were seen as flexible and responsive to feedback, ready to try new ideas and adapt according to the circumstances of their classes. However, this is may be due to the selection of the sample of teachers open to the C.O.A.C.H training rather than any result of the training itself.

Training mentors reported noticeable improvements in the trainees' practice early in the training, referring to increased confidence and the application of coaching methods supported by a stronger coaching knowledge base with small improvements, in terms of insight and reflection.

Overall, the training mentors appeared to have positive attitudes to the C.O.A.C.H. programme. Although overall scores recorded during training were not significantly higher than those related to practice prior to training, there was recognition that whilst the trainees were highly competent before the C.O.A.C.H training, there was a richness to the skills the C.O.A.C.H. trained teachers brought to the school. These tended to be soft skills of listening and sharing and support: '*relations with colleagues has become more effective*' [TM2];'*understands people, empathy, understands contexts*' [TM10]; '*always ready to propose something or share other staff member's ideas*' [TM3]

(Interviews with Training mentors)

Principal Interviews

In all countries, evidence was given of improved interpersonal relationships between the trainees and their pupils and colleagues alike. The C.O.A.C.H. trained teachers were often seen as being more open-minded and ready to listen to the ideas and opinions of others. They were seen to be more self-confident, ready to take risks and try new strategies, '*welcoming attitude towards new situations*' [P3]; '*able to respond quickly to advice perceived as enriching*' [P2]; '*open minded, eager to participate*' [P3]; '*high participation, active participation in different activities*' [P4]; '*uses COACH as professional development tool and she is more self-confident now'* [P8]

Institutionally, there were many reports that the trainee was held in higher regard, with greater influence, even after only a short period of training. In many institutions, the principles and practices were cascaded throughout the institution, both formally and informally. Comments like '*after this training she is cooperating with colleagues about the techniques and makes contributions to professional development*' [P8] and '*coaching training created a common approach to working together on tasks and solving problems in the department*' [P6] indicate that school leaders attributed the positive effects to the C.O.A.C.H. training.

Whilst overall ratings did not change significantly, many individual points like '*now she can deal with any kind of problems regarding students*' [P7]; '*higher awareness of her professional performance*' [P1]; '*enhanced capability in coping with the complexity of relationship inside the school community*' [P1] and '*she is using COACH trainings in the class management*' [P8], indicated an overall positive effect of the C.O.A.C.H programme on the trainees, their colleagues and most importantly, their pupils. (Interviews with school principals and headteachers).

Self – Assessment Questionnaires

The self-assessment questionnaire consisted of 71 Items across the four categories of Coaching Competencies, Foundations of Coaching: 11, Co-Creating the Coaching Relationship: 13, Communication: 16, and Learning and Achievements: 31. Micro-level analysis of each task would be of interest, although overly detailed for the current paper. Data here has been aggregated across each category, revealing trends across countries within each category. Participants recorded their own competence and their rating of the importance of that competence for each of the 71 items.

Mean ratings across all respondents within each country are reported. These allow comparisons across countries and comparisons between self-reported competency and

ratings of importance. The narrow range of scores, the fact they are interval values from a Likert scale and their non-normality makes the use of correlation between ratings of practice and importance unreliable as a measure in this context.

Item-total correlations are calculated for each item within its category. This relationship gives a measure of 'discrimination', which in this context gives an indication of the extent to which any one item differentiates between respondents who respond in a strongly positive manner and those less so. Respondents who score highly on an item would tend to score highly overall and those who respond less strongly on an item, would tend to score less overall in each section. In the current context those items with a high-item-total correlation give an impression of the traits which best characterise the categories with which they are associated. Those with a low item-total correlation would indicate that the item was measuring a different characteristic altogether.

Foundations of Coaching

National Comparisons

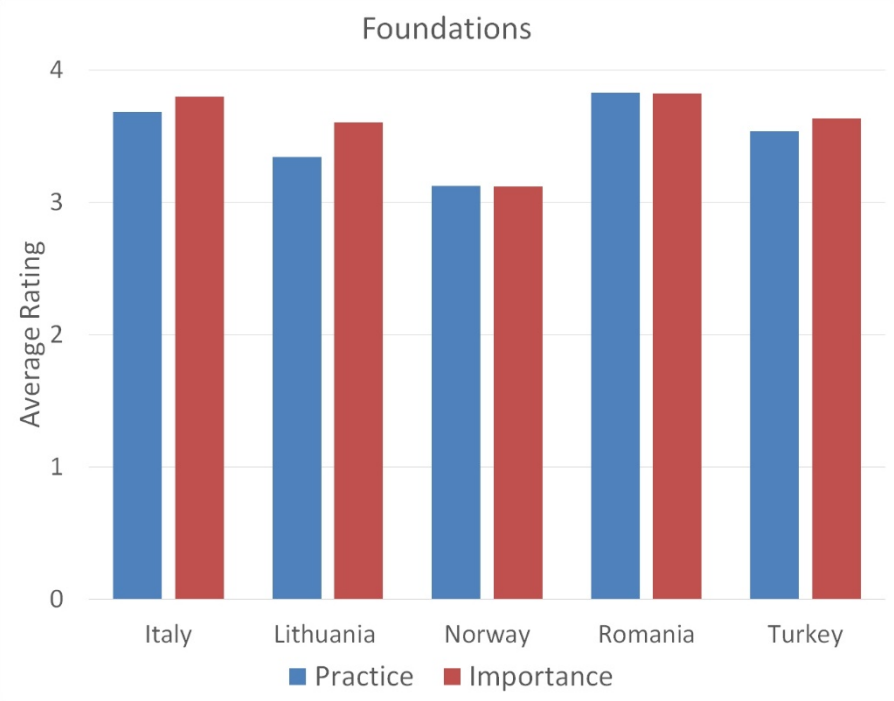

Figure 1 – Foundations of Coaching – Practice and Importance

The Norwegian participants rated themselves lower than all other participants from other countries across all the items within the section on the Foundations of Coaching (Figure 1). This occurred at the aggregated level but also at the micro level of individual items (not shown here). Romania and Italy, both self-reported very high Foundation competencies and importance of those competencies. Across all countries and for each competency (not shown here), the ratings for practice and those for importance were closely related.

Item-Total Correlation

The item total correlation results (Figure 2) give an idea of the extent to which any single item is representative of the overall trait being evaluated, in this case Competence in the Foundations of Coaching.

Current data shows that Item 8 (I understand the guidelines and specific considerations of the Coaching relationship e.g. Logistics, Fees, Scheduling, Inclusion of others if appropriate) is a strong discriminator in the category of competence in Foundations of Coaching. There is a close relationship between scores on this indicator and score in this category overall. Put simply, if coach trainees 'get' this competence then they tend to 'get' the Foundations and conversely, if they fail to have a solid grasp of this competence, they tend to do less well in the whole category. At the other end of the scale, Item 1 *(I understand the ICF Code of Ethics)* yields a relatively low Item-whole correlation in Foundations of Coaching. There is not as strong a relationship between scores on this indicator and scores in the category overall. This implies that participants' rating of their understanding of ICF Code of Ethics, is not strongly related to their overall competence in the Foundations. Other notable indicators were the high item-total correlation on Item 9 (*I discuss with the coachee the guidelines and specific considerations of the coaching relationship e.g. Logistics, Fees, Scheduling , Inclusion of others if appropriate*) which implies a coherence with Item 8 and that the coaching guidelines and their communication are competencies which play an important part of the practice of the Foundations On the other hand, items 4 (*I explain the distinctions between coaching, consulting ,psychotherapy and other professions)* and 7 (*I know the professional support resources which are available*) also had low item-whole correlation with the overall score in Foundations of Coaching.

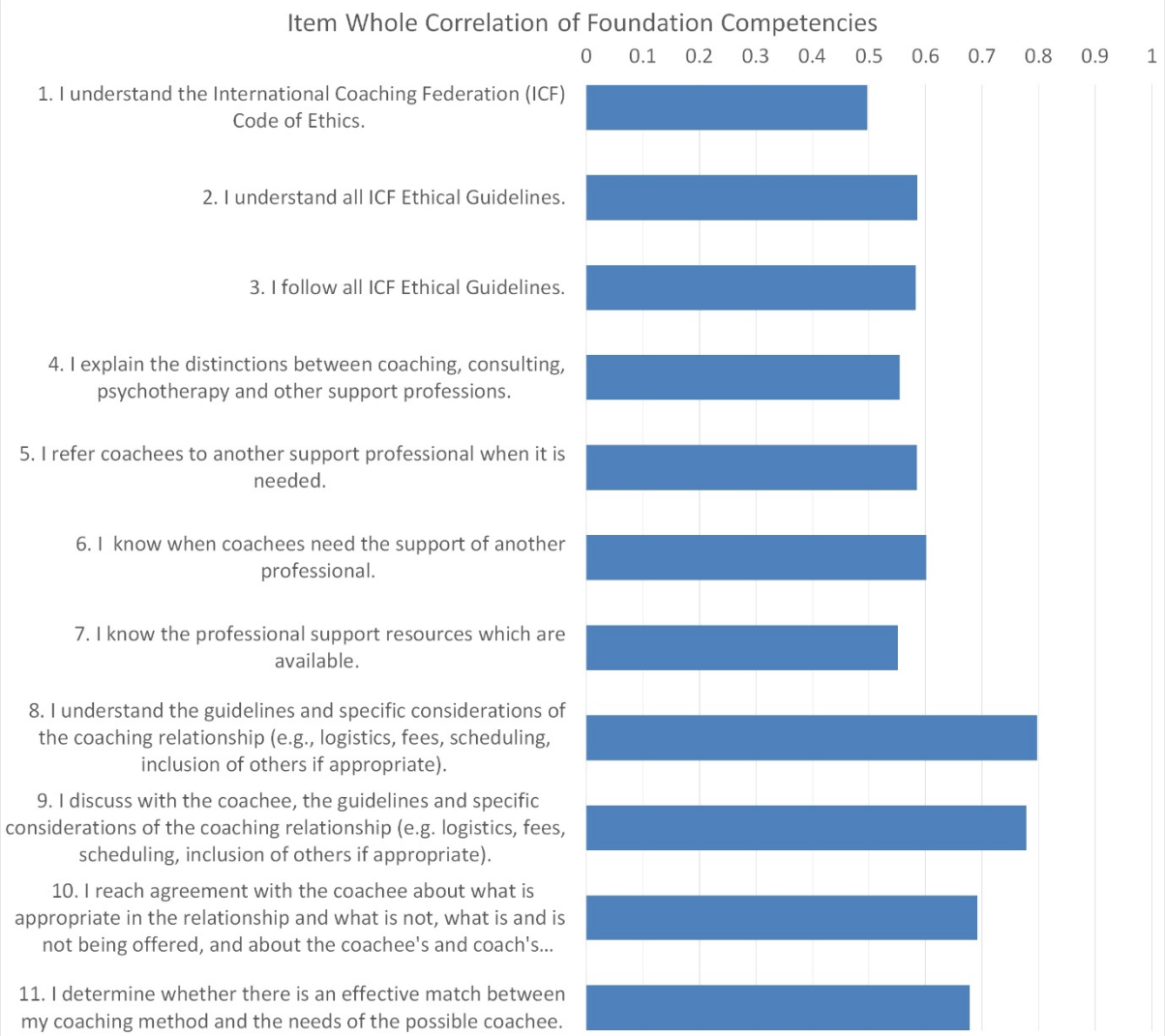

Figure 2 – Item-Total Correlation – Foundations of Coaching

Co-Creating the Relationship between Coach and Client

National Comparisons

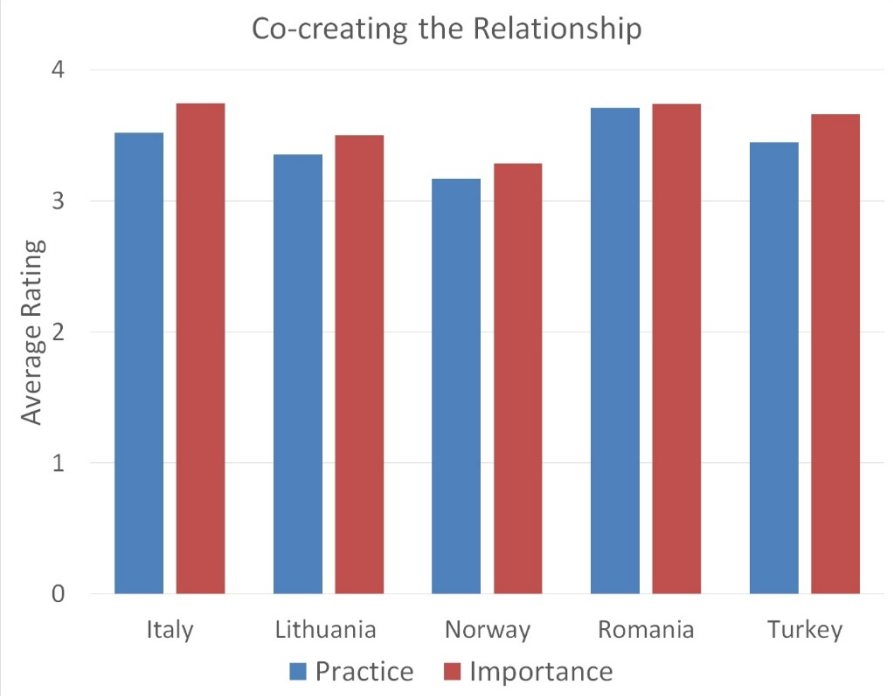

Figure 3 – Co-Creating the Relationship – Practice and Importance

With regard to Co-Creating the Relationship between Coach and Client, the Norwegian participants, once again self-reported a lower competence than those from other countries. (Figure 3) However, this difference was not as great as that for self-rating for the competencies in Foundations of Coaching.

As with Foundations of Coaching, the ratings for importance were closely related to ratings for competence and on average the ratings for importance were higher than those for competence. There are no large differences between participating countries, although as with Foundations of Coaching, Romanian and Italian participants rated themselves slightly higher than participants from other countries. On average, data collected during the training programme, showed participants self-reporting as highly competent in the domain of Co-Creating the Coaching Relationship with the Clients. At item level there was a variety in responses across countries. In some cases, such as Item 13 (I establish clear agreements and keep promises), there was strong uniformity across all countries. Yet in others such as Item 19 (I am open to 'not knowing' and taking risks) there was great variation across countries,

Item-Total Correlation

Item-total correlations for the category of Competency in Co-Creating the Relationship between Coach and Client (Figure 4), show that some items are better discriminators than others. That is, that some items better reflect the competency than others. Items 12 (genuine concern…), 22 (use of humour…) and 24 (confidence […] with strong emotions) give a moderate item-total correlation of about 0.5. These traits may be seen as coach 'personality' traits and so in self-reporting, individuals are not associating their rating of this with their self-rating of overall competence in this category.

However, other items such as 16 (I ask permission of the coachee…) and 17 (. I am present and flexible …) give a strong item-total correlation of over 0.7.

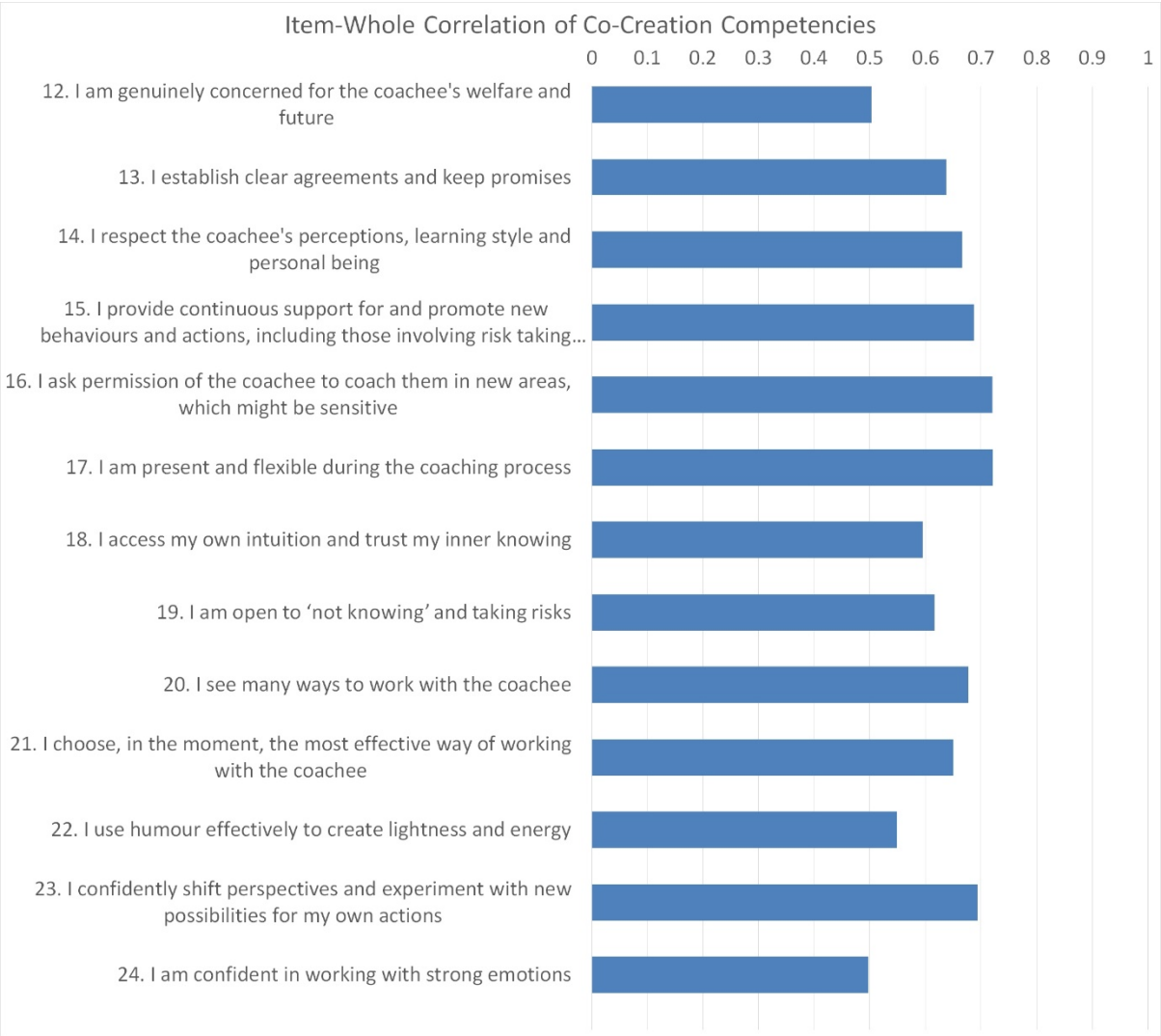

Figure 4 – Item-Total Correlation – Co-Creating the Relationship

Communication

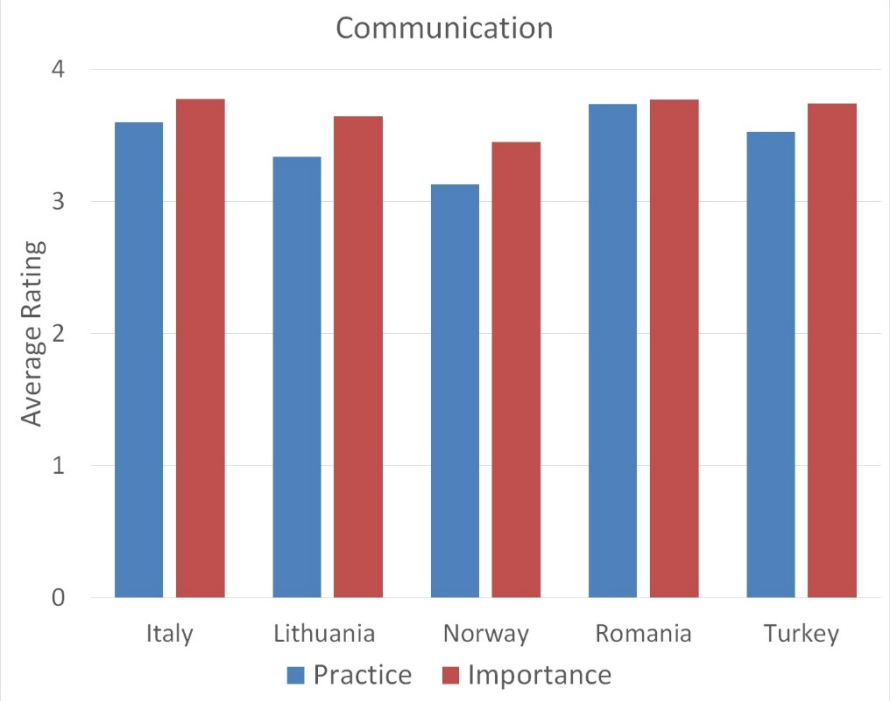

Figure 5 –Communication – Practice and Importance

National Comparisons

Self-assessment scores for Communication we generally high across all countries. No large national differences were reported although, Norway once again reported a slightly lower competence than other countries. The patterns here were very similar to those for Co-Creating the Relationship, perhaps indicating that the indicators may have some common factors. Ratings for importance were generally high, in all cases higher than the ratings for competence, indicating that participants recognised importance of communication as a core competence of coaching.

Item-Total Correlation

The item-total correlations for Communication show a high level of reliability across items (Figure 6). Relatively high correlations demonstrate that the indicators of competence in Communication are well aligned with each other. Particualrly high measures associated with 28 (I summarise, paraphrase, reiterate…) and 29 (I encourage, accept, explore and reinforce…). Indicate that participants see this process of listening and ensuring clarity are central parts of the Communication competence in coaching. This somewhat conflict with the relatively low correlation for 37 (I am clear and direct in providing feedback). Whilst 0.6 is still relatively high Item-Whole correlation. This might indicate that the reiteration and ensuring clarity is perhaps less of a dialogue than might be desired.

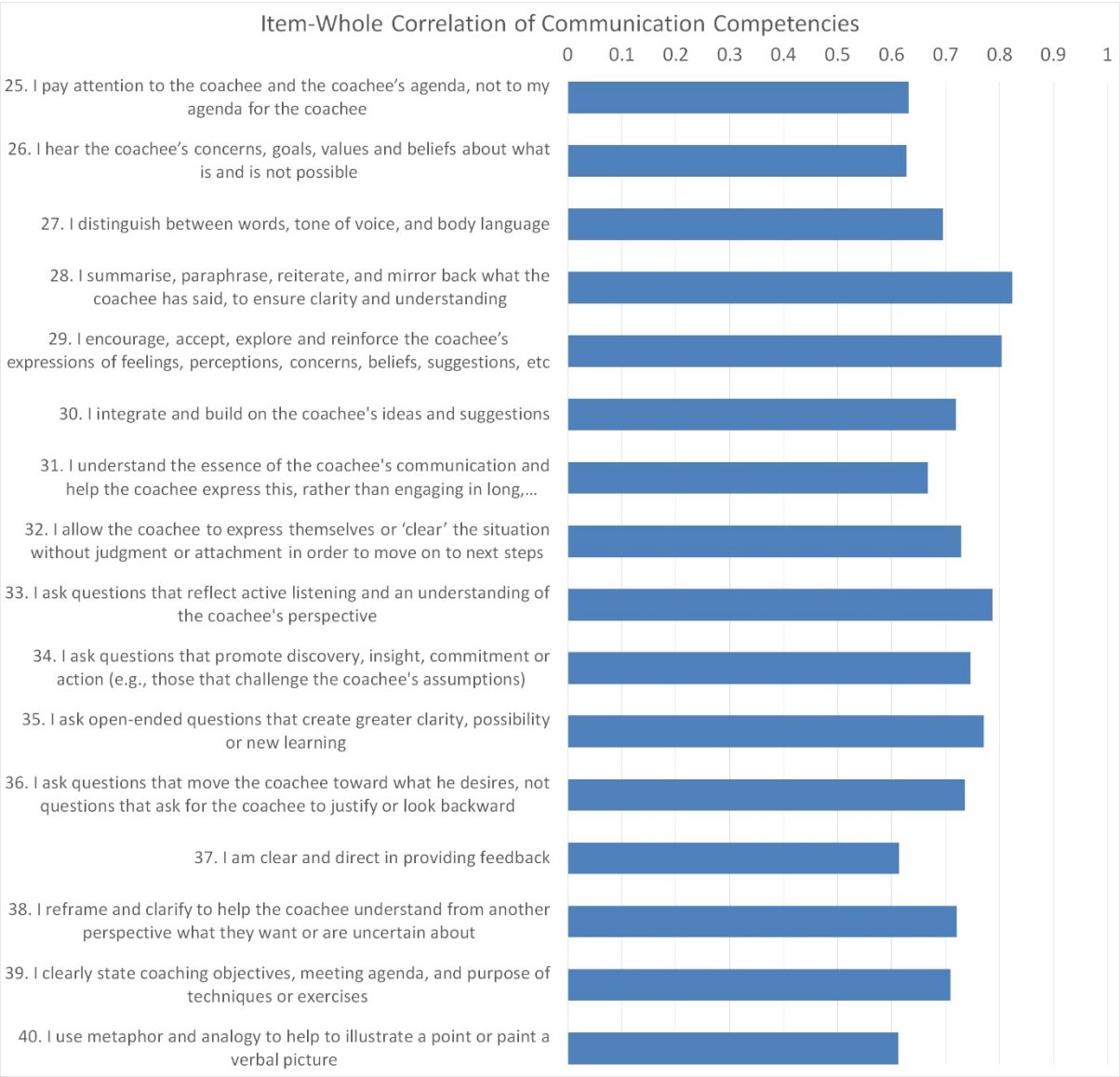

Figure 6 – Item-Total Correlation – Communication

Learning and Achievement

National Comparisons

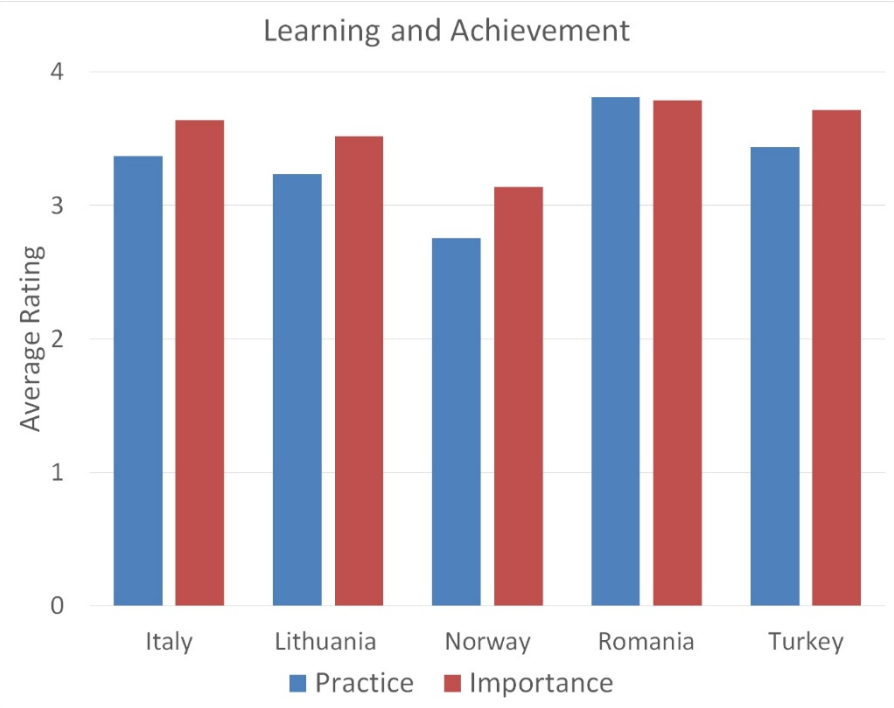

Figure 7 –Learning and Achievement – Practice and Importance

Self-assessment scores for competency in Learning and Achievement were noticeably lower than in other those for competency in other categories for Italy, Lithuania and Norway (Figure5). In particular, the Norwegian trainees scored themselves particularly low, in terms of their competence in Learning and Achievement. This was the weakest response amongst all countries in all categories.

The competency scores for Romania are high, as is consistent with other categories. Ratings for the importance of the Learning and Achievement competencies are consistent with ratings in Foundations of Coaching and Co-creating the Relationship and Communication. The implication of this is that the C.O.A.C.H trainees do not see these traits as any more or less important than those of the other domains

Item-Total Correlation

The item-total correlations for Competence of Learning and Achievement show a high level of reliability across items (Figure 6). The relatively high correlations, between 0.6 and 0.8 demonstrate that all items are well aligned with each other and the overall construct of Competence of Learning and Achievement.


Item-Whole Correlation of Learning and Achievement Competencies
0
0.1
0.2
0.3
0.4
0.5
0.6
0.7
0.8
0.9
1
41. I think beyond what is said, in assessing coachee's concerns, not getting hooked by the coachee's description.
42. I use inquiry for greater understanding, awareness, and clarity.
43. I identify with the coachee, their underlying concerns; typical and fixed ways of perceiving themselves and the world. E.g. differences between the facts and the interpretation; and differences between thoughts, feelings, and action.
44. I help coachees to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them.
45. I explain broader perspectives to coachees and inspire commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new possibilities for action.
46. I help coachees to see the different, related factors that affect them and their behaviours (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, and background).
47. I explain insights to coachees in ways that are useful and meaningful for them.
48. I identify major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching.
49. I ask the coachee to distinguish between insignificant and significant issues, and situational and recurring behaviors, when I detect a difference between what is they say and what they do.
50. I develop ideas and assist the coachee to define actions that will enable them to demonstrate, practice, and deepen new learning.
51. I help the coachee to focus on and explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals.
52. I encourage the coachee to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions.
53. I promote active experimentation and self-discovery.
54. I celebrate coachee successes and capabilities for future growth.
55. I challenge coachee's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action.
56. I promote and bring forward points of view that are in line with the coachee's goals and, without bias, engage the coachee to consider them.
57. I encourage stretching and challenges but also a comfortable pace of learning.
58. I collect and use information to create a coaching plan and development goals with the coachee that address concerns and major areas for learning and development.
59. I create plans with results that are attainable, measurable, specific, and have target dates.
60. I make adjustments to plans as warranted by the coaching process and by changes in the situation.
61. I help the coachee identify and access different resources for learning (e.g., books, other professionals).
62. I identify and target early successes that are important to the coachee.
63. I clearly ask of the coachee, actions that will move the coachee toward their stated goals.
64. I accept the coachee for what they have done, not done, learned or become aware of since the previous coaching session(s).
65. I effectively prepare, organise, and review with the coachee, information obtained during sessions.
66. I keep the coachee on track between sessions by holding attention on the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s).
67. I focus on the coaching plan but am open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions.
68. I move back and forward between the big picture of where the coachee is heading, setting a context for what is being discussed and where the coachee wants to go.
69. I promote the coachee's self-discipline and hold the coachee accountable for what they say they are going to do.
70. I develop the coachee's ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop themselves. (E.g. to get feedback, to determine priorities and set the pace of learning, to reflect on and learn from experiences.)
71. I confront the coachee with the fact that they did not take agreed-upon actions, in a positive way.

Figure 8 – Item-Total Correlation – Learning and Achievement

Discussion

In the current context of this research, it is worth noting that as these are self-reported competencies, these indicators do not necessarily reflect that any group has higher competency in any category, only that their self-reporting of that competency is higher. To some extent, the same is true for ratings of importance. The lack of a shared datum makes the comparison across countries problematic. Cultural differences in self-reporting might be one factor in the variation between results from each country.

Foundations

The elements of understanding the professional positioning and practice of coaching within the wider field of therapeutic or mentoring activities, within the Foundations of Coaching had the lowest correlation to the overall assessment of competence. They provide the least discrimination within that category, implying that trainees felt that their competence in this area was generally not strongly related to their feelings of competence in the other areas within the Foundations of Coaching. This is supported to some degree by the relatively low scores in the attitudes towards the importance of these categories. This may raise some concerns regarding the knowledge base of the Foundations and reinforces the earlier call for the development of a solid basis for the remit of coaching practices in education. So far, there are no unified foundations for the practice or accreditation of coaching (Lofthouse and Hall, 2014). The disparate nature of the field could explain, to some extent, the above results.

Co-Creating the Relationship and Communication

For the purposes of this analysis, the categories of Co-Creating the Relationship and Communication are treated together. The responses and analyses shared many common features and the traits associated with each of them have some commonality. Within these categories, the items that relied on self-assessment of procedural or technical tasks, give the highest discrimination. They most closely reflect responses to the categories as a whole. This may be because they are more easily achieved or assessed,

Although the data is not shown here those items which require reflection on practice tend to elicit diversity in responses across countries whilst those which enquire about coach-client interactions tend to elicit greater uniformity across countries. This may indicate that reflective practice is viewed differently across countries or that self-evaluation of this process in itself requires high levels of reflectivity.

The more technical and procedural elements of Co-Creating the Relationship and Communication are perhaps easier to comply with and more easily self-assessed. The more affective items, those traits that require an embodiment of the principles of Co-Creating the Relationship and Communication are less closely correlated to overall competencies in the category. This highlights the possibility that amongst these trainees at least, coaching is seen, to some degree, as a technical task, in which competency can be achieved through the fulfilment of a series of practices rather than embodiment of certain traits or attitudes which are identified as competencies by the ICF. At this level the trainees appear to follow the letter rather than the spirit of coaching principles. Given the centrality of dialogue and

collaboration in coaching for CPD (Lofthouse, 2019; Kennedy, 2014) which relies on co-construction between coach and coachee through relationships of mutual trust (Lofthouse, 2019; van Nieuwerburgh, 2012), findings in this category raise the question of the link between coaching as a technical task and coaching as relational. This has implications for thinking about 'collaborative professionalism' (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018) and evaluating teachers' self-efficacy' (Lofthouse, 2019).

Learning and Achievement

Those is no particular aspect of these items which stands out as being a strong discriminator, every item in this category is a good indicator of the overall self-evaluation of competence in this particular area. The ratings for importance of the traits in the Learning and Achievement category are high, which indicates that the trainees recognise that these are important characteristics. This contrasted with the generally lower Competency scores in this category implies that these competencies are the most difficult to achieve. They are clearly seen as important, but less commonly self-assessed as achieved than those in other categories. These results are unlikely to be an effect of national differences in self-reporting behaviour as these would be seen across all 3 categories. Many of the competencies in this category might be seen as higher order practices, requiring advanced practices of client engagement. Possibly the level of engagement interrogated within the Learning and Achievement competencies reflect a level of development within coaching which has not yet been achieved by the trainees within the C.O.A.C.H programme at the interim stage when the survey was carried out.

Conclusions

The results of the semi-structured interviews show that schools have a general positive attitude to staff undergoing coach training. Whilst this might be expected from the management who supported the training, it is worth noting that training mentors and colleagues were also very positive about the coach trainees and their influence across the school. This stands in contrast to other studies in the UK which showed that the professional development of teachers through coaching could be impeded by highly performative school contexts that were unfavourable to the values of coaching (Lofthouse and Hall, 2014; Lofthouse and Leat, 2013). This variation highlights the importance of national and cultural contexts for understanding practices and beliefs around coaching in education (Choukry and Cox, 2018) It is a reminder that the principles of coaching cannot be uncritically taken as universal, as is sometimes assumed. Coaching, as a social process (ibid), is not neutral, which can explain variations in responses across national contexts in this study. Whilst the critical examination of these social processes is beyond the scope of this paper, an awareness of the values that guide the principles examined here is of importance.

The results of the survey have shown that trainees undergoing the process of C.O.A.C.H. training have a tendency to be quite procedural in their practice and do not immediately embrace all the principles embodied in the ICF Coaching Competencies. Those competencies which can be learned and or copied, procedurally tend to be more easily and consistently achieved by trainees. However, those which require higher order understanding tend to be more variable and are often not seen as being integral to competency as a coach. Put simply, it appears that trainees are more able to act or behave as a coach rather than believe or think like a coach. This has important implications for the

practice of coaching, strongly relational in practice, and focused on co-creation/construction between coach and coachee (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012) . How can deeper relationships of mutual trust be established if the focus is restricted to procedure? Lofthouse and Thomas (2017) highlighted co-construction as central to the sharing of professional knowledge and encouraging new action and reflection. It can be surmised that these skills of 'collaborative professionalism' (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018) would be difficult to reach is the emphasis is on coaching as a technique rather than a deeper collaborative engagement. This also raises issues where trainees fail to recognise the role or function of a coach and the purpose they serve, within a wider range of professional, therapeutic and clinical services. It calls for a clear delineation of the role of coaching, its purposes, values and forms of engagement. The discourse of coaching, internationally, has not been devoid of neoliberal undertones (Choukry and Cox, 2018; Rosén, 2011). Developing a reflection of the role of coaching, its position and its purpose for teacher CPD can help avoid the pitfalls of instrumentalism in coaching, where procedure takes over deeper values. This can help re-situate the practice of coaching as a transformative, relational, collaborative and enabling process for teachers and students.

Across all 3 categories the scores for competency follow the same pattern as those for importance. In general, scores for importance tend to be higher than those for competence. One possible inference, notwithstanding the acceptance that correlation does not imply causality, is that a better understanding of the competencies and their relevance might result in a greater adoption in practice. The implication of this is that there may be pedagogical approaches to embedding the Coaching Competencies within practice, and to helping trainees achieve this. This is cause for optimism that, in many areas where participants did not feel competent, there was still recognition that these aspects were of importance and hope that the trainees would endeavour to achieve competence in these areas.

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