4-30-2015

# A case study of professional coach-client communication.

Scott Shank
*Western Michigan University*, scott.shank.jr@gmail.com

Potential Identities: A Case Study of Professional Coach-Client Communication

Honors Thesis

Scott Shank

School of Communication

Western Michigan University

April 27, 2015

Presented for review to

Julie Apker, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Leah Omilion-Hodges, Ph.D., Committee Member

**Abstract**

Organizations increasingly embrace coaching as a core process to improve employee learning, increase overall performance, and develop leaders. Extant research on coaching is increasing, yet communication-based theories are underrepresented in the literature despite the fact that coaching is fundamentally discursive in nature. Further, although the coaching literature suggests that coaching conversations contribute to client identity growth and potential transformation, studies that specifically explore such activities are underrepresented in existing scholarship. Further, there lacks sufficient research examining how coaching contributes to the ongoing identity development of the coaches themselves. To fill this gap, this qualitative study explored the role coaching plays in facilitating client and coach identity development. Three professional coaches were interviewed, and themes were explored through the symbolic interactionism theoretical lens. Goffman's dramaturgical theory and Hecht's Communication Theory of Identity were also used to understand the complex, communicative process of identity development present in coach-client interactions. Findings suggest coaching can serve as a space in Goffman's backstage region, which provides clients a private setting to rehearse and try on potential identities. Hecht's Communication Theory of Identity also has value to assist in the discovery of client identity gaps and explore possible communication strategies to reduce such gaps. Conclusions and pragmatic implications are drawn to guide future theorizing and applied practice.

**Potential Identities: A Case Study of Professional Coach-Client Communication**

The International Coaching Federation (2014) defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential," (http://www.coachfederation.org). This creative process occurs primarily though one-on-one conversations structured by a professional coach who, by listening, providing feedback, and asking questions, assists the client in his/her development (Rogers, 2012). Coaching is inherently communicative in nature, requiring both coach and client to engage in ongoing, mindful discourse centered on achieving client goals. Coaching conversations not only assist clients in behavior change initiatives, but also contribute to identity transformation (Butcher, 2012).

Coaching emerged in an organizational context as companies sought to benefit from their employees' developmental growth leveraged through the coaching process. For example, coaching coupled with traditional training methods has been found to increase employee productivity by as much as 88% compared to those who received training without coaching (Homen & Miller, 2008)**.** Organizations increasingly embrace coaching as a core process to improve employee learning, increase overall performance, and develop leaders. Bacon and Spears (2003) estimate that nearly 60% of large U.S. companies use executive coaches for employee development. The popularity of coaching has expanded beyond the development of upper-level decision makers to middle managers and even entry-level employees. The trend has also increased expectations on managers to provide coaching-style leadership to their subordinates (McCarthy & Milner, 2013).

Although research shows the usefulness of coaching to increase individual productivity or develop leadership competencies in potential executives, less attention has been given to the

theoretical development of the coaching process. Coaching theory may be likened to a pragmatic entree where ingredients are taken from various fields such as behavioral psychology, organizational development, business management, neuroscience, etc. Each coach possesses a perspective influenced by his/her own occupational background. Further, the research literature, emerging in the 1990s and continuing to the present, stems from multiple disciplines and with a decided pragmatic focus. For example, Homen and Miller's (2008) text describes the coaching process, offer best practices, and provide a blueprint for organizations to implement coaching programs. Bacon and Spears (2003) emphasize coaching as the "art and practice of a client-centered approach to performance improvement."

This practical orientation of coaching research has spawned many prescriptive frameworks articulated by professional coaches with the practitioner in mind rather than advancing the field theoretically. Only within the last decade have academic researchers begun to use theories to support practices and examine coaching and its effects. For instance, in 2008, Harvard's International Coaching Research Forum began hosting an initiative involving a group of researchers and coaching professionals to set a course for future coaching research (http://www.instituteofcoaching.org). That same year marked the creation of the *International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring.*

Extant research acknowledges the importance of communication, but coaching scholars do not use communication-discipline concepts or theories even though coaching is discursive by nature. Due in part to its history within the discipline of psychology and the results-oriented field of business management, the coaching literature has a gap that can be usefully filled by communication research. Nuanced insights from communication theory that could enhance coaching techniques and enrich understandings of coach-client relationships have remained silent.

Recognizing the discursive nature of coaching, its organizational context, and its ultimate end of assisting clients in maximizing their potential, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature by exploring the coaching process from an organizational communication perspective.

Also missing from the research literature on coaching is its inherent effect on client identity. The purpose of coaching primarily concerns the development of self; it is a process of becoming (Rogers, 2004). Various dimensions of identity construction have been shown to be prevalent in coaching conversations (Butcher, 2012). However, communication theories of identity have yet to be applied to the interactions between coach and client. Identity as discourse has become a useful and pervasive frame for exploring how individuals negotiate their sense of self. Thus, this study seeks to discover how the conversations that occur in coaching sessions explicitly or implicitly contribute to client identity development and/or transformation. If identity work is explicitly discussed, then further research should develop new coaching frameworks to enhance the construction of client identity through the coaching process and to provide tools for clients to gain more control over their identity formation.

## Literature Review: Communication as Identity

### Philosophical Foundation

Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas (2008) categorize the philosophical frameworks used by organizational scholars to study identity into three groups: functional, critical, and interpretive. The functional lens is concerned with how employee identity and identification might affect valued organizational outcomes. For example, Swann et al. (2009) found that employee/organization identity congruence led to higher employee commitment to their work team and organization. Other functional interests might be whether organizational identification affects job performance, motivation, loyalty, etc.

The critical lens is concerned with power relations and understanding how identity may be used as an instrument of control and resistance. Organizational leadership may not set rigid protocols to be enforced, but may choose to shape employee behavior through crafting a narrative based on company values that employees then assimilate to. "When an organization becomes a significant source of identification for individuals, corporate identity (the perceived core characteristics of the organization) then informs (self-)*identity work*." (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002, p. 625). For example, Wieland (2010) discovered the ideal-self (who I/we should be) crafted by leaders of one organization became a resource for the employees' identity construction, regulating not only their work-identity, but also their sense of self outside of work.

The interpretive lens focuses on "how people craft their identities through interaction, or how they weave 'narratives of self' in concert with others and out of diverse contextual resources within their reach." (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 8). The goal is to explore and describe the rich, yet complex relationships between individual, social, and organizational identities. Down & Reveley's (2009) study on whether frontline managers rely more upon narrative or interactional conceptions of identity during organizational change falls into this category. An interpretive approach has been used in this study to explore the coach-client communication of professional coaches. The ways in which clients use the meanings derived from coaching conversations as resources to develop their personal or work identity is of primary interest.

**Communication Theoretical Frameworks**

Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism paved the way for understanding identity as a social process of negotiation (Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009). Goffman built upon Mead and emphasized the dramaturgical nature of identity performance. Goffman (1959) observed that individuals attempt to project a definition of a given situation through performing an act before

an audience. The audience thus responds accordingly, going along with the performance. Using theatrical terminology, Goffman provides an exposition of social interaction. Whether alone or in teams, humans seem to know exactly how to perform their roles in culturally appropriate manners. The concept of regions and region behavior is significant is Goffman's work. His observation into how behavior changes based upon whether the performance takes place on a "frontstage" or "backstage" provides incredible insight into the way people enact their identities before different audiences. An actor's formal position is visible on the front stage, where they are expected to adhere to the conventions that have meaning to the audience (Goffman, 1959). Backstage, however, is a more honest context. Performers may still be in costume, but interactions lack the idealization necessary for when the audience is present.

Role identity became a central element in symbolic interactionism, promoting the view of the self as a social construct that emerges from people's roles in society (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Social Identity Theory followed, emphasizing that the categories with which a person identifies define them and offer a sense of belonging (Hogg et al., 1995). Swann (1987) explored the link between how a person's self-views and others' perceptions of them shape the process he called *identity negotiation*. He found individuals seek to verify their sense of self through the appraisals of others. When this occurs, the individual experiences greater identity congruence. When discrepancies occur between the person and their appraiser's perceptions, a "battle of wills" occurs where each attempts to persuade the other to see things their way, thus negotiating their identity (Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009).

Organizational communication scholars owe a debt to the interactionists for bringing emphasis to the social and interactive nature of identity construction. Identity is more than a static, essential quality; it is a dynamic, ongoing process. One where an individual emerges "not

as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate." (Davies & Harre, 1990). The move toward identity as discursive process has opened the door for communication scholars to elaborate not only how identity expresses itself through communication but also how communication is itself identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

The communication theory of identity (CTI) assumes identities have individual, social, and communal properties, which are enacted through communication (Hecht, 1993) Like previous theories, CTI understands the construction and management of identity as an ongoing process of social interaction. The theory differs from interactionist perspectives in that it focuses more on the mutual influences between identity and communication (Jung and Hecht, 2004). It is through communication that social roles are crystalized into identities. These roles are then enacted and expressed to others through communication. Hecht views communication as identity, not just the product of it. The theory posits four frames through which identity occurs: personal, enacted, relational, and communal.

The personal frame refers to a person's characteristics: their self-concepts, feelings, spirituality, or other meanings ascribed to the self (Gudykunst, 2005). Elements such as self-perceptions of personality and character fall into this frame. A person may view him/herself as smart, hard working, and an incredible cook; these traits exist in the personal frame of identity. The self-perceptions of the personal frame do not exist in isolation; they are expressed through the enacted frame. The enacted frame is where an individual's identity is expressed through verbal and nonverbal messages in social interactions. "Not all messages are about identity, but identity is a part of all messages." (Hecht, 1993, p. 79). Goffman's dramaturgical theory fits nicely within this frame. The performances through which a man expresses masculinity or a

police officer demonstrates her authority are both examples of enacted identity. When any

identity from the other three frames is communicated, it can be viewed through the frame of

enacted identity.

The relational frame consists of the various identities developed through relationships

and has four levels. *Ascribed relational identity* occurs when the perceptions of others are

internalized, shaping an individual's view of self (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Another level occurs

when a person constructs an identity though the relationship to another. For example, a mother

identifies as such only because of the relationship to her children. Most people have many

relational identities, such as a father who is also a coach, husband, and friend. The third level can

be useful to examine the relationships between the relational identities a person possesses. The

fourth and final level occurs when the relationship itself is the unit of identity, such as when two

refer to themselves as a couple (Jung & Hecht).

The last of the four frames is communal identity (Hecht, 1993). This frame is useful to

examine how collective identities emerge out of the interactions within groups and networks.

Identities such as American, Buddhist, and PTO member can fit within this frame when the

group identity transcends the personal identity. Collective identities can also become personal

identities if the individual sense of self transcends that of the group. For example, a person's race

may fit in either the personal or communal frame, depending on which is a more salient identity.

The frames are not meant to serve as containers for identities to fit neatly within. The

value of the CTI is its ability to overlap, juxtapose, and analyze identities to see what insights

emerge. Interpenetration describes the way one aspect of identity can fit in multiple frames, such

as the example of race previously mentioned. Although the four layers were developed due to

linguistic limitations, they are not meant to remain separate (Choi & Hecht, 2011). The term

interpenetration is also used to describe the interaction between identities as frames overlap. Analyzing an individual's communication behavior through the personal frame of being male may lead to a certain result. Taking a multi-frame approach to see how his personal and relational identities line up with his enacted identity may lead to another. Perinbanayagam (2012) states that individuals have "one complex self, with many identities through which the self finds a unified whole." The concept of interpenetration may be messy, but allows flexibility to analyze both the complex and unified self.

The theoretical construct of *identity gap* stems from the concept of interpenetration. "Identity gaps are defined as discrepancies between or among the four frames of identity." (Jung & Hecht, 2004). An example of a personal-relational identity gap might be when an individual's self perceptions about being funny do not align with the view of others. Studying this gap may lead the individual to discover its cause and create a communication strategy to bring alignment between the personal and relational frames. A manager who has been given a position as leader, yet for some reason does not demonstrate leadership is an example of someone with a personal-enacted identity gap. According to Jung and Hecht, (2004) identity gaps are inevitable. They happen for a variety of reasons including ineffective communication or a lack of awareness, transparency, and consistency.

The theoretical foundations for this study emerged from the tradition of symbolic interactionism. Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory and Hecht's Communication Theory of Identity will serve as theoretical lenses that will assist in examining the communication behaviors in the coaching process and explore in what ways the communication that occurs in coaching conversations affect client and coach identity formation. It is of interest to determine whether the metaphor of dramatic performance can be useful in the coaching process. Could the

coaching conversation serve as a "backstage" environment for clients and coaches to explore

identity without the pressure of having to perform? It is also of interest to see whether the CTI

can provide useful insights into the coaching process, specifically regarding identity gaps. Thus,

the study poses the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the perceptions of coaches regarding the role coaching plays in facilitating

client identity?

**RQ2:** What role does the coaching process play in facilitating coach identity?

**Method**

**Design**

This exploratory study used a qualitative design consisting of individual interviews. This

design aligns well with the study's symbolic interactionist underpinnings and illuminates

meanings of the complexities of organizational life, which would not be able to be obtained

through surveys or experimental methods (Tracy, 2013). Using a grounded approach, transcribed

data was reviewed multiple times by the author/student investigator (SI) in consultation with the

primary investigator (PI)/supervising faculty member. The SI and PI collaborated to identify

major themes and categories within the data.

**Participants and Procedures**

Recruitment began from within the student investigator's professional network. Several

coaches were invited to participate in the study and asked to provide referrals. A total of sixteen

professional coaches received invitations by email. Recruitment efforts stopped once the research

goal of participation of three coaches was attained.

The subject population consists of three professional coaches currently living within the

United States. All three participants hold a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) credential with

the International Coach Federation, which requires a minimum of 125 hours of coach specific training, 750 logged hours of coaching, and completion of a comprehensive exam (http://www.coachfederation.org). The three participants are female and have 20+ years experience in their respective fields prior to becoming coaches. Coaches were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. One coach (Wendy) is an ordained minister and coaches clients primarily from the nonprofit realm. Another coach (Pamela) transitioned from an executive role in a large corporation and specializes in coaching executives and organizational leaders. The third coach (Jan) has a background in organizational training and development in large healthcare systems. Her clientele often includes individuals transitioning into management and leadership positions within the healthcare industry.

Individual interview data was collected in one day per professional coach. Interviews were conducted for 90 minutes on a date and location convenient to the participant. Two interviews occurred face-to-face, and one took place over the phone. In-depth interviews, common to the grounded approach, draw from the members' own interpretations of the events and highlight their lived experiences (Charmaz, 2006). Interviews followed an interview schedule consisting of open-ended questions drawing on the literature on communication theories of identity and coaching (Appendix A).

The SI audio recorded the interviews, which were then transcribed within twenty-four hours using transcription software (https://transcribe.wreally.com). Within one week of each interview, participants were provided an electronic copy of the transcript for review, clarification, and further comment. All three participants reviewed their transcripts and two replied with feedback. Transcripts yield 30 pages of single-spaced text.

**Analysis**

Transcripts were transferred into NVIVO 10.0 qualitative analysis software program. The SI used open and axial coding techniques to identify major themes and categories to develop a codebook (Appendix B) which was used for subsequent reviews of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Six themes emerged from the data. The SI expanded on the codebook to compose analytic memos pertaining to the major themes that were found. Following steps outlined by Tracy (2013), memos consisted of the themes' descriptions and definitional properties (inclusionary and exclusionary criteria), illustrative examples from interviews, quotes, antecedent conditions, consequences, relationships to other codes, and evolving interpretations (Appendix C).

**Results and Interpretations**

Throughout the coding process, six themes emerged in relation to the communication of professional coaches. The first three fall under a broader category of setting expectations and establishing the relationship. First, coaches communicate to explain and articulate coaching philosophy to the client. Second, they set boundaries that distinguish coaching from other helping services such as counseling and consulting. Third, coaches inform the client on what is expected of them. The fourth theme consists of references to the communication behaviors used in coaching session. Theme five consists of the coaches' individual backgrounds/identities and theme six encompasses topics discussed in coaching sessions, which included many stories of client identity change and transformation.

The remainder of this paper will utilize the data from these six themes to explore the role the coaching process plays in facilitating both client identity and coach identity. The metaphor of coaching as 'dressing room" in Goffman's backstage area is explored as a theoretical device to assist in understanding how coaching might assist in client identity construction. Hecht's

Communication Theory of Identity, particularly his concepts of interpenetration and identity gaps, also provide a useful theoretical lens in which to interpret study data. CTI specifically promotes understanding of how coaching might be used to assist a client in negotiating identity, reducing gaps, and maintaining greater identity congruence. The impact of coaching on coach identity will also be explored, taking into account the influence of training on the similarities in coaches' philosophies of coaching. The notion of *hat-switching*−a term used by all of the coaches to describe navigating the various roles a coach plays figures prominently in the data. Further, the influence of the coaches' background on coaching sub-philosophies will also be considered in this analysis.

**Role of Coaching in Client Identity Change**

Hecht (1993, p. 79) stated, "Not all messages are about identity, but identity is a part of all messages." This quote rang true throughout the descriptions coaches provided about coaching. Seldom did a coach refer to a coaching conversation in which the client or coach explicitly used the word "identity," however, many of the stories told by coaches reveal direct contributions of coaching to client identity transformation. As described below, the philosophy of coaching (as distinguished from counseling, consulting, etc.), the expectations placed upon clients by coaches, and the communication behaviors of coaches all impact client identity. The stories about topics discussed in coaching sessions demonstrate how coaching can serve as a catalyst of client identity change.

**Philosophy of coaching.** Data show that although coaching philosophy has its unique set of assumptions and values, sub-philosophies exist that distinguish individual coaching approaches. One value shared by all three coaches is to respect and honor the client as the expert. Participants believe clients are healthy, whole, and capable of becoming the person they desire to

be. This means that although the coach may be the expert in processes of communication, learning, leadership, etc., the client is treated as the content expert on the topics explored in coaching interventions. This perspective empowers the client and relieves the coach from having to give advice, provide solutions, etc. Rather, the role of the coach is to draw out insights, solutions, goals, and action steps from the client.

Participants' remarks indicate that coaching also has a future/pragmatic orientation. This finding contrasts with Rogers (2012) holistic principle that coaching addresses a person's past, present, and future. The participants' concern is not with details of the client's past, but with exploring the client's current situations and obstacles. Coach and client work together to discover new options and possibilities that can be implemented by the client in the future. For instance, when asked about her coaching philosophy, Wendy's said:

> In coaching we'll take a person from where they are now and move them forward into the future, dealing with people that are relatively healthy and ready to move forward. So very seldom in coaching (some coaches may disagree), but very seldom do I go into the past.

The future/pragmatic orientation allows coaches to assist clients in learning to solve their own problems, overcome obstacles, set and achieve goals, and maintain self-accountability. If a client begins spending too much time talking about the past, a coach may recommend they discuss those issues with a licensed counselor.

Remarkable consistency exists among the descriptions coaches gave regarding their philosophy of coaching. These similarities could be due to the fact that all coaches in the sample received training approved by the same credentialing body. In fact, many themes from the study, mirror ICF core competencies such as *establishing the coaching agreement* and *co-creating the relationship* (http://www.coachfederation.org/credentials/core-copetencies). However, the SI

noticed sub-philosophical preferences between coaches, such as coaching the whole person (a

holistic approach) vs. coaching primarily around work/professional development. Wendy's

communication revealed a more holistic approach of "not coaching the problem (issue) but

coaching the person." Pamela, on the other hand, preferred to remain within the sphere of

behavior change on work-related topics to enhance professional development.

When exemplified through the communication behaviors of coaches, the philosophy of

coaching puts clients in the driver's seat of their own development. For instance, coaches convey

affirming messages that clients are a) healthy and whole individuals, b) experts of their own lives

and professional contexts, and c) focused on future goals and actions. Such communication

contributes to clients' developmental change and transformation. This unique set of values and

corresponding communication behaviors distinguishes coaching from other helping

services/interventions such as therapeutic counseling and leadership consulting. However,

perceptions still persist among clients that coaching is the same as counseling and consulting.

Thus, coaches must spend a notable amount of time communicating with clients about coaching

boundaries.

**Communicating boundaries.** Coaches said they must frequently communicate with

clients to clarify what coaching is and is not. This is consistent with observations of Feldman and

Lankau (2005), who distinguish the role of executive coach from that of adviser, career

counselor, mentor, and therapist. When asked, "How do you exemplify your (coaching)

philosophy in your communication to clients?" all three coaches discussed having to distinguish

coaching from counseling and consulting. Jan's quote exemplifies this view:

A key part of one of our competencies is co-creating the relationship with the client. You

have to make clear to them what coaching is and is not. We have to be very clear that we

are not their consultants. We are not there to provide expertise. We believe the solutions

reside in our clients. That's the first thing. We're also not counselors. In fact, we're

ethically bound to refer clients we think may need counseling because coaching is all

about moving forward.

Coaching is not counseling because it assumes health and wholeness and does not focus on the

past. Wendy describes counseling by saying it "goes into a person's past and brings them from

the past to the present so they can function normally in the present. A counselor would deal with

unhealthy issues, with unhealthy people." For Wendy, coaching takes healthy people into the

future, assisting them in reaching their potential through learning, goal setting, and

accountability.

To distinguish coaching from consulting, participant coaches also appeal to the notion of

locus of expertise. Consulting is when a person with expertise is called on to share their insight

and provide solutions. Coaching, on the other hand, respects the client as the one possessing the

expertise, answers, and solutions. This boundary protects coaches from the "rescue model" of

coaching, where the coach presumes to be the expert, provides more answers than questions, and

begins to make decisions for the client (O'Neill, 2000). The coach's expertise is in the coaching

process, which helps the coach to draw out the content from the client thus facilitating the

client's transformation. When asked whether clients quickly pick up on the distinction between

coaching and consulting, Pamela replied:

Oh no, I almost always have to explain. I think part of that is because the waters have

become muddied in the coaching world, particularly in the executive and leadership ranks

that I work in… It gets confusing because they expect me to tell them what to do.

Sometimes we have to have that discussion more than once, but it's part of our agreement

at the front end. In fact, if they're interviewing me before they decide to work with me (which happens most often), I let them know that my style is much more based in inquiry and observation than it is in advice or consulting.

The "muddied waters" make communicating what coaching is and is not that much more important. Communicating boundaries to distinguish coaching from other interventions is a useful strategy used by coaches to frame the relationship, solidify the roles of the coach and client, and to provide definition of the coaching process by stating what it is not (http://www.coachfederation.org, 2014). Communication about the philosophy of coaching and how it differs from other helping, client-focused services often occurs at the beginning of the coaching relationship, even prior to the first actual coaching session. This form of early boundary setting helps clients learn what to expect from their coach and likewise learn what their coach expects of them (Bacon & Spears, 2003).

**Coach expectations of clients.** Data reinforce that coaching is based on a trusting relationship between coach and client (Rogers, 2012). For coaching to be effective, clients must demonstrate what the coaches called "active engagement." This includes commitment to the relationship and a willingness to be honest, open, and vulnerable. The client must also be prepared to provide the content to be discussed in coaching sessions and willing to hold themselves accountable for self-determined goals and action steps that emerge. To the coaches interviewed, the myth that coaches can "work their magic" to transform an individual's life is misguided. Rather, study data supports the research literature by showing that coaching is active engagement on the part of both client and coach to promote personal growth and development (Homen & Miller, 2008). Pamela's comment below articulates this view.

> For someone to really see a difference in their life and their work, it takes engagement. If they're not willing to fully engage, the result they receive will be measured. It may not be as great at they expected or as great as their manager expected…if the coach is really doing their part, and the other person doesn't engage, then the results won't be what everyone would like them to be.

All three coaches pointed out that accountability, trust, and vulnerability are essential in a coaching relationship. To them, such factors create contexts, which promote client reflection, self-awareness, and growth. All those interviewed said that clients, not coaches, are primarily responsible for their own development. Coaches simply provide the process. A quote from Wendy illustrates the connection between accountability, trust, and client growth:

> Yes, there is a lot of accountability. When you engage a coach, the coach is going to ask you some really challenging questions, and there's going to be a lot of openness, a lot of truth. If your coach is doing the job well and if you've engaged the same coach for a period of time, the coach may call you on inconsistencies because you've built that trusting relationship. I think you would learn the value of, as Patrick Lencioni says, "getting naked" which means making yourself vulnerable. You're allowing yourself to be uncovered, and I think that's really helpful for leaders.

Coaches also pay attention to client's communication, taking special interest in whether they perceive the client's willingness to engage the process. O'Neill (2000) calls this "keeping ownership with the client" and suggests testing the executive's ability to own his part of the issue. If a client does not show engagement through their communication, attitudes, and commitment to action, the coach may decide to terminate the relationship. Pamela described the

scenario of being approached by a company to coach a potential CEO and what she said and did to screen the person as a possible client.

> Well, I'm listening pretty closely in that first meeting to see if Mark is going to engage. If he is blaming or shaming or not taking responsibility for the role that he can play in a coaching engagement. If he is not taking responsibility for the changes he can make, then I don't want to work with him.

The communication by coaches of expectations placed on their client helps establish the coaching relationship. What also became apparent in interviews is that setting and managing expectations gives coaching the potential to be life transforming. If expectations are not set, there is no guarantee the client will engage the coaching process. For example, if a client anticipates the coaching session to be a therapeutic time of simply getting things off their chest, without the expectations of there being a focused issue, concrete action steps, and self-accountability, little growth or development should be expected.

**Topics in coaching conversations.** Thus far, communication about the coaching process has been explored, and indicates that, indeed, the coaching process contributes to client identity transformation. Coaches help clients with performance and productivity, interpersonal interactions, negotiating organizational change, transitioning to new roles, communication skills, and practically any other topic related to personal or professional development. While not mentioned directly by the coaches interviewed, the client's identity is at the core of the majority of the stories shared about conversations that take place within a coaching session. Coaches participating in Butcher's (2012) study also recognize the construct of identity as integral in the coaching process; yet they perceive it as residing in the background of what they do. The

following story about an introverted executive, told by Jan, exemplifies the intersection between

coaching and client identity.

> One gentleman I coached was very, very introverted, but he was the Chief Operating
>
> Officer of the hospital. Based on a 360 he got feedback on, he found out from peers and
>
> direct reports that he was perceived as mean, unavailable, and all he cared about was
>
> money. It was all because of his demeanor, just his presence. We had to work on getting
>
> him to make eye contact in the hallway. Now this was a Chief Operating Officer of a
>
> huge medical center, but it was so unnatural for him to do these things. We worked on
>
> basic things like eye contact and saying hello to others. He was appalled and horrified
>
> when he realized how he was being perceived. The goal was to get comfortable going up
>
> to nursing floors and rounding. He said, "I'd rather stick needles in my eye than go and
>
> chit chat with people." He was a pharmacist before, and he wasn't a people person. And
>
> he wasn't going to become a people person, but he could still learn the behaviors. He said,
>
> "I guess I can smile at three people today." It was sort of a joke at first, but then he
>
> started getting different responses from people. People started coming into his office and
>
> saying, "This is a concern," and bringing issues that could impact cost containment or
>
> resources. It was a real positive. I still hear from him. He said, "While I still fall back into
>
> some old habits, I'm fifty percent more friendly than I used to be."

This story is about much more than teaching a COO how to be friendly. The story shows a

leader's journey of becoming aware of how traits developed during his prior identity as

pharmacist were being wrongly perceived by others. It's about his being repulsed by the gap

between his own self-views and the judgment of others. This gap in identity affected his

interpersonal relationships and organizational leadership. Coaching provided a safe environment

for him to process feedback from the 360-degree assessment, explore how his actions contributed to the false perceptions, and create an action plan of behavioral change. The coaching intervention led to change in the client's behavior, change in how his subordinates and colleagues perceived him, and change in the organization.

Other stories shared in interviews demonstrate how coaches assist clients in negotiating their work identity. These stories resemble themes of another study where coaches shared about coaching clients through "threatened identities, competing identities, and transitioning identities" (Butcher, 2012). Such clients may be at a professional crossroads, uncertain of next steps and perhaps lacking skills and confidence to transition into new roles and work identities. In the narrative below, Jan describes a client in such a transition:

> I was helping a woman grieve after accepting the fact she was now a Chief Nursing Officer with a completely different role than she had. "You're having a hard time letting go, what can we do to help you let go?" I asked, "What would symbolize that?" She said, "Well, the pin that I earned when I graduated nursing school." I said, "What would be a way to pay respect to this incredible career you've had that will help you move on?" She ended up putting it in a jewelry box and ceremoniously putting it in a drawer. This was over the phone… It was a point in time in the coaching that helped her move forward to create a new identity and see something new in herself.

According to Jan, the client's actions had important symbolism. She figuratively placed her former identity as a clinical nurse into a box and ceremoniously laid it to rest. This ritual reveals the emotional identity work that accompanies transition that may best be accomplished only in a client-coach session. Outside the relationship with her coach, where would this executive turn to discuss such deep sentiments? The safe environment of coaching allowed her to explore how she

felt about the transition, receive the observation made by the coach about her difficulty in letting

go, and generate a meaningful ritual to honor her past identity while embracing the new.

      **Insights from identity theory.** The previously explored themes paint a picture about the

communication of professional coaches throughout the coaching process. Examples have been

given that exemplify the effects of coaching on client identity change. Exploring the findings

through Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical lens, particularly the concepts of performance regions,

provides added insight into the role coaching can play in assisting client identity construction.

      Goffman (1959) argues that each organizational setting has its unique culture and

accepted behaviors that are communicatively performed in both front stage and back stage

settings. The front region of an organization is where performances take place before an

audience. In this region, clients are expected to act in accordance with organizational codes,

cultural norms, etc. In the backstage, however, the client's communication is hidden from the

audience. An employee might act and communicate one way backstage, but will appropriately

adjust their behavior when entering the front region. Applying the concepts to executive

leadership, Grant and Sharma (2011) argue, "there is a segregation between back and front

'performing regions' that serves to minimize potential incursions, leaks, disruptions, and faux

pas that may undermine the leader's narrative and storytelling performances."

      To be effective leaders, executives must be ready to perform their duties in accordance to

the expectations that accompany their particular roles. Pamela mentioned companies hire her to

help young leaders who have potential but need to be "polished" and learn "executive presence."

These young professionals possess talent, but need to learn and practice skills necessary for

interactions on the front-stage. Jan has coached many through transition from a role of

professional contributor to manager/leader. Clients going through this type of transition are given new roles and must adapt to learn how to effectively enact these new work identities.

The coaching relationship is a place of trust and confidentiality, a place where clients can try on and rehearse identities before the curtain goes up for a public audience. Goffman (1959) describes the bathroom as an exemplar of his concept of back stage region. Is it possible that coaching serves as a dressing room (bathroom) in the backstage of the client's professional life? The privacy in coaching sessions afforded leaders by coaching allows them to be vulnerable and open while honestly exploring work related situations. While in the "dressing room," clients have opportunity to explore their roles, learn new scripts, practice new communication strategies, etc., without the pressure of being on the front stage. They can brainstorm, dream, process their feelings, set goals, and make plans with the assistance of an individual trained to actively listen, ask questions, challenge assumptions, and ensure self-accountability (Swann, Johnson & Bosson, 2009). The dressing room of coaching provides an important context in which clients can practice the identities they aspire to perform in "real life." Findings from the present study suggest that coaching facilitates client boundary spanning and identity negotiation from the dressing room to the front stage of organizational life (Hogg et al., 1995).

Hecht's Communication Theory of Identity also offers explanatory value in understanding the identity work that occurs during coaching interventions (Hecht, 1993). Recall that CTI consists of personal, enacted, relational, and communal frames for understanding person's multiple social identities. All of these frames figure into coach-client communication. Coaches assist clients in negotiating between their self-views (personal lens), their roles and the perceptions of others (relational lens), their organizational identification (communal lens), and the ways these identities are expressed through communication (enacted lens). Coaches help

clients identify, understand, and enact desired identities that can be transferred into context outside of coaching sessions (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

Moreover, the concept of interpenetration is useful to examine how these various identities overlap (Gundykunst, 2005). Interpenetration refers to not only the observed consistencies across the four frames but also the contradictions and discrepancies. Coaches can listen for discrepancies between the various frames of identity and help the clients become aware of what Jung and Hecht (2004) call "identity gaps." Once the client is aware of the identity gap, coaching questions could help the client move forward by processing their own contribution to the problem, brainstorming communication strategies to reduce the gap, and setting goals to enact these strategies. The end result of the coaching intervention would be greater interpenetration of the four frames, which could foster greater identity congruence. According to Swann et al. (2009), identity congruence can lead to greater fit among organizational members, increase employee commitment, and foster creativity and innovation, amongst other benefits.

To summarize, Goffman's front and backstage regions are useful metaphors for framing how the coaching process assists clients in rehearsing identities before enacting them through communication before a public audience. The exploratory nature of CTI makes it a useful tool for understanding the inherent complexity of multiple identities, which interact to make up a single, unified self. The next section will consider the role communication in the coaching process plays in facilitating coach identity.

**Role of Coaching in Negotiating Coach Identity**

The study initially sought to explore the effects of the coaching process on client identity construction. However, data indicate that coach communication also has implications for their own identity formation. Identity was described earlier as a social process of negotiation, where

self-views interact with the perceptions and expectations of others (Swann, 1987). Coach communication regarding their professional background/identity, the coaching philosophy, and boundaries of coaching all contribute to coach identity. Coach identity, in turn, influences the communication behaviors enacted in coaching sessions.

      **Coaching philosophy**. The introduction to the philosophy of coaching made a profound impact upon the identities of each of the study participants. Note the language they used below to describe what happened when they explored coaching as potential careers and became immersed in the philosophical underpinning of the profession (italics added for emphasis).

| | |
|---|---|
| Pamela | I knew a little about it but not much. *It was like lightning had hit me*. It was absolutely... I felt like it took all of the things I learned in my business life and put them into work that would be meaningful for me. |
| Jan | *It has changed a lot of who I am*. Like I said, I spent much of my life trying to acquire knowledge that I can impart. Now my life is less about what I can tell others and more about curiosity and inquiry and all that is part of being a coach. |
| Wendy | When I was introduced to coaching… *a light just went on* and I thought, "I've had this backwards all this time."… I learned, "Wow, I can empower people by helping them become responsible for their actions, for following through on the goals they set."… It helped me change how I interact with people, how I do leadership, and how I work with teams. |

According to the participants, internalizing the philosophy of coaching transforms you, which then overflows into your interpersonal relationships. The coaches mentioned that coaching skills and knowledge extended beyond their professional roles, to improving their personal lives. For

instance, Jan mentioned how coaching has affected the way she parents by using questions to assist her daughter in discovering/processing the personal values behind a particular behavior or decision. Wendy said coaching helps her marriage by improving her listening skills and increasing her willingness to be vulnerable with her spouse.

Philosophies of coaching appear linked to receiving credentials from a quality, reputable, and credible professional organization. All three participants possess Professional Certified Coach (PCC) credentials through the International Coach Federation (ICF). The ICF is the largest coaching association with over 20,000 credential holders. In the world of coaching where "there are nearly as many definitions of coaching as there are practitioners and researchers," the ICF provides a specific definition broad enough for all coaching to fit within (Maltbia, Marsick, & Ghosh, 2014 p. 163). The ICF endorsed training received by the participants was evident by the extreme similarity in coach philosophy and the described sequence of communication in the coaching process. Nearly identical responses were given when asked to describe a typical coaching conversation. All conversations start with a question such as, "What would you like to discuss today?" to help the client set the agenda.  At some point, the coach will ask, "What do you want to walk away with from this session?"  Throughout the conversation, the coach asks questions and provides feedback to help the client explore options and generate actions steps.

**Personal coach background.** Findings suggest that a coach's professional background may constrain or limit the coach's client pool. The context of the coach's pool, in turn, affects the coach's sub-philosophical preferences. Coach background also shapes the expectations placed on the coach by their clients, which the coach then has to manage (Clegg et al., 2007).

All three participants mentioned their client pools consist primarily of individuals working in their former fields. The greatest contrast is between Wendy and Pamela. Wendy's

background as an ordained minister has led to a broader range of coaching clients. She coaches

individuals ranging from pastors and executive leaders to a client she helped transition from a

rehabilitation program back into society. In contrast, Pamela's background as an executive

within a large corporation positions her to coach primarily executives and other high-potential

leaders. While both possess extremely similar coaching philosophies, Wendy appears to take a

more holistic approach to coaching, willing to allow clients to explore topics from any life area.

Pamela on the other hand, stated she specifically coaches in the "behavioral realm" of work-

related topics in client's professional development.

Coaches' backgrounds also influence the expectations placed on them by clients. When

asked, "Why do clients come to you for help?" Pamela replied:

 I would say because of my background, because I was an executive, which is really

antithetic to what I told you earlier of what a coach does. I'm really more of a facilitator

of process than I am a consultant. But that's usually the first thing that catches their eye.

Coaches cannot ignore the perceptions of clients regarding who they are and what they do as a

coach. The expectations placed on coaches and the ambiguity of what coaches do require identity

work in the form of clarifying and articulating their identities to clients (Clegg et al., 2007).

Referencing their background may increase the perceived credibility by clients, yet the

association comes at the expense of having to differentiate their identity as coach from that of

consultant or counselor (Ruane, 2013). The challenge of negotiating coach identity may help

explain why participants spend such a great deal of time communicating with clients about the

boundaries of what coaching is and is not.

**Communicating boundaries.** The communication that distinguishes coaching from

other helping roles has previously been discussed at length. This communication by coaches not

only provides clarity to the client, but also "can be considered 'overt' identity working, because the individual coaches are making conscious choices about how to present themselves to others." (Ruane, 2013, p. 112). While there are certain identities the coaches were adamant to distinguish themselves from, namely consultant (who presumes to be the expert) and counselor (who focuses on healing issues of the past), there were behaviors associated with these roles coaches occasionally employed. Jan reveals her communication strategy for such situations in the following account:

> There are going to be times when I have some experience to share. As coaches, if it's in a true coaching relationship…I would say, "I'm going to take off my coach hat and put on my mentor hat because I was in this situation myself and this is how I dealt with it. It wasn't a good decision because ___, or it worked out really well because___." It's shared in that context.

Wendy also talked about "hat switching."  She said that she only occasionally uses it, but when she does, she asks the clients permission before sharing an insight and encourages them by saying, "If it fits, keep it. If it doesn't, throw it out." Throughout the interlude, she ensures the direction of the conversation remains with the client. Hat switching appears to be in important strategy for coaches to negotiate their identity when an overlap occurs between various roles. It reinforces the boundaries previously set with client while also reconciling the internal conflict from enacting communication contrary to a pure coaching role (Ruane, 2013).

**Insights from identity theory.** The dramaturgical lens can also be applied to the coaches' presented identities. After all, the client is not the only actor in coaching interactions. Goffman (1959) explains how people perform to define a situation and act out their roles based on the real or perceived expectations placed on them. If coaches aren't careful, they may engage

in a performance in response to the expectations of a client, yet one that veers away from the

coaching script, which maintains that clients are leaders in their own identity development

(Williams, 2003). On the other hand, if a client expects the role of consultant, and the coach

doesn't deliver, the client may not engage the process or may become dissatisfied by the

perceived lack of coaching ability inferred by the failure to measure up to the clients

expectations.

Goffman's concepts of frontstage and backstage regions are also relevant to coach

identity. While coaching sessions may occur in the client's back region, the coach

simultaneously participates in a frontstage performance. The coach is not free to say or do

whatever they like. Their role is actually quite specific, with self-imposed communication

constraints that come with it. This precarious scenario where one actor's front stage performance

attempts to cultivate a backstage environment for the other is worth examination. What is the

consequence if the coach's performance is unsuccessful in convincing the client to behave in

back-stage behaviors of honest, candid, and vulnerable communication? How might a client react

if they perceive the intervention to be just another arena where they must put on a front?

Butcher's (2012) study exposes such a predicament of clients engaging the coaching process

"through their professional identities ("suits and scripts") rather than their personal identities."

This demonstrates the challenge facing coaches to enact authentic performances in such a way to

build trust and cause clients to view coaching as their personal, backstage dressing room.

Hecht's concept of interpenetration is also useful in exploring the complexity of coach

identity. Participants in the study appear very aware of the nuances of their role as coach and

how it contrasts and overlaps other roles such as mentor, consultant, counselor, etc. The amount

of communication by coaches to establish roles and expectations with clients may also contribute

to greater interpenetration of the coaches' identities (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Hat switching serves as an example of a communication strategy used to navigate the overlap between various roles enacted by coaches.

The concept of identity gap did not align well with the study data on coach identity. Coaches were silent on the matter. This lack of conceptual convergence may be due in part to the client-centered nature of coaching or the initial focus of the research. The study initially sought to explore the role coaching plays in client identity construction, which shaped the questions used during interviews. Had interview questions been included to specifically target coach identity work, Hecht's CTI may have provided greater insight into the potential identity gaps experienced by coaches. Studies such as Ruane's (2014) show coach identity work is a rich and promising topic for continued research.

## Practical Applications

The study provides several take-a-ways for coaches and clients. Coaches can use communication theories of identity to more explicitly talk about identity work with clients. Framing identity around communication might avoid veering into the realm of psychology or counseling. If identity is defined as performance or enacted communication, then coaches can ask questions about how clients express their identity through communication, which focuses on behaviors rather than psychological concepts such as dispositional qualities, personality, etc. This aligns well with the action-oriented nature of coaching.

Second, recognition of the profound impact coaching can have on client identity should evoke both excitement and caution in coaches. It is an amazing thing to possess skills that have the potential to facilitate growth and transformation. On the other hand, caution should be taken to ensure the client remains in control of their own identity construction. Coaches appear

cognizant of keeping their own agendas out of the coaching relationship, but there may be subtle influences such as organizational culture, expectations of the client's boss, etc., which may attempt to shape the agenda clients brings to coaching conversations. Becoming more attuned to the connection between coaching and identity can increase awareness of the potential for an organization to assert its own agenda into the coaching relationship. Coaches can honor clients by helping them navigate the tensions between their personal and professional identities.

Hecht's theory of identity can also serves as a valuable framework for exploring the overlap and discrepancies between various frames of a client's identity. Coaches could create four tactile objects to represent personal, relational, communal, and enacted frames of identity. Having clients manipulate and physically overlap the objects could help them to see the interpenetration among frames and potential identity gaps. For example, the coach could have clients overlap the personal and communal frames and ask them to compare their personal values with their organization's culture and values. Comparing the enacted frame of a leader (how they express their leadership through communication) with the relational frame (how others perceive them as a leader) could also be insightful. The flexibility of Hecht's theory is a perfect fit for the exploration and learning inherent in coaching.

Clients should understand the importance a coach's training plays on their philosophy of coaching. If an individual were considering hiring a development coach, it would be recommended to inquire into the coach's background and training. It may be important for the coach to provide credentials from a reputable organization such as the International Coach Federation or the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches.

Clients should also be aware that success in coaching is not guaranteed. The client must commit to "actively engage" the process in order to see the desired results. There is nothing

magical about coaching, but the stories in this study demonstrate that good coaching combined with active engagement by the client can have life-transforming consequences. Coaching may not be for everyone. If a potential client is willing to be honest, vulnerable, and self-accountable, coaching will be a good fit.

## Limitations & Future Directions

Despite the similarity of coach responses and the rich descriptions from the stories shared, the study has several limitations. During the planning stage, the decision was made to recruit participants with either PCC or MCC credentials from the International Coach Federation. While this ensured a credible and qualified sample, the similarity in coaching philosophy and communication behaviors among the three coaches may be a reflection of their training rather than the reality experienced by coaches in general. Future research may minimize this limitation by expanding the research pool to include non-ICF coaches. Second, the sample size is very small. In the future, scholars should increase the number of participants to add to the diversity of perspectives, life experiences, etc. Finally, the qualitative stories shared by coaches provide vivid examples of how coaching affects clients' identity formation. Such narratives provide rich, applied examples of communication theory concepts, but are not generalizable beyond the lived experiences of study participants. In the future, using quantitative measures could explore the correlation between a coach's background/identity and its effect on coaching style and the language used in their communication with clients. Such quantitative approaches would also triangulate qualitative data in ways that could provide a more robust conceptualization of coaching communication and theories of identity.

**Conclusion**

Coaching has established itself as a useful intervention for organizations to increase individual performance and develop leadership competencies in potential executives. The popularity of coaching has expanded beyond the development of upper-level decision makers to middle managers and even entry-level employees. As coaching continues to gain the attention of researchers, coaching practice will be enhanced be the further development of theoretical frameworks. Identity as discourse has become a useful and pervasive frame for exploring how individuals negotiate their sense of self. Symbolic interactionism provides a foundation for communication scholars by emphasizing the social and interactive nature of identity construction. Goffman's dramaturgical theory and Hecht's Communication Theory of Identity highlight the way identity is enacted in an ongoing process of communication.

This study uses an interpretive approach to explore coach-client communication by conducting interviews to examine the experiences and perceptions of professional coaches. Whether and in what ways clients use the meanings derived from coaching conversations as resources to develop their personal or work identity is of primary interest. The study aims to fill a gap that exists within coaching and organizational literature by exploring the coaching process through a communication theory of identity perspective.

**References**

Alvesson, M., Ashcraft, K., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the

construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organiziation,* 15(1). 5-28.

doi:10.1177/1350508407084426

Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the

appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies 39*(5), 619-644.

doi: 10.1111/1467-6486.00305

Bacon, T., & Spear, K. (2003). *Adaptive coaching: The art and practice of a client-centered*

*approach to performance improvement*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black.

Butcher, J. (2012). Exploring the link between identity and coaching practice. *International*

*Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring,* Special Issue 6, 119-129. Retrieved

from: http://ijebcm.brookes.ac.uk/documents/special6-paper-09.pdf

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage.

Clegg, S., Kornberger, M., & Rhodes, C. (2007). Desperately seeking legitimacy: Organizational

identity and emerging industries. *Organizational Studies,* 28(4), 495-513.

doi:10.1177/0170840606067995

Davies, B. & Harré, R. Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory*

*of Social Behavior*, 1991, *20*(1), 43–63. Retrieved from:

http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x/pdf

Down, S. & Reveley, J. (2009). Between narration and interaction: Situating first-line supervisor

identity work. *Human Relations,* 62(3), 379-401. doi:10.1177/0018726708101043

Feldman, D. & Lankau, M. (2005). Executive coaching: A review and agenda for future

research. *Journal of Management,* 31(6), 829-848.  doi:10.1177/0149206305279599

Goffman, E. (1959). *Presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.

Grant, D. & Sharma, A. (2011). Narrative, drama and charismatic leadership: The case of

Apple's Steve Jobs. *Leadership,* 7(1), 3-26. doi: 10.1177/1742715010385777

Gudykunst, W. (2005). *Theorizing about intercultural communication*. California: Sage.

Harvard's International Coaching Research Forum. (2014, December 9). Retrieved from:

http://www.instituteofcoaching.org/images/pdfs/100researchideas-icrf.pdf

Hecht, M. L. (1993). 2002—A research odyssey: Toward the development of a communication

theory of identity. *Communication Monographs*, *60*, 76–81.

Hecht, M. L., & Choi, H. (2011). The communication theory of identity as a framework for

health message design. *Health Communication Message Design: Theory, Research, and*

*Practice*, 137-152.

Hogg, M., Terry, D., & White, K. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of

identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly,* 58(4), 2250269.

Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2787127

Homan, M. & Miller, L. (2008). *Coaching in Organizations: Best coaching practices from the*

*Ken Blanchard companies.* New Jersey: Wiley.

Jung, E & Hecht, M. (2004). Elaborating the communication theory of identity: Identity gaps and

communication outcomes. *Communication Quarterly,* 52(3), 265-283.

doi:10.1080/01463370409370197

Maltbia, T., Marsick, V., & Ghosh, R. (2014). Executive and organizational coaching: A review

of insights drawn from literature to inform HRD practice. *Advances in Developing*

*Human Resources,* 16(2), 161-183. doi:10.1177/1523422313520474

McCarthy, G & Milner, J. (2013). Managerial coaching: Challenges, opportunities, and training.

*Journal of Management Development, 32, 7,* 768-779. DOI 10.1108/JMD-11-2011-0113

Newsom, G. & Dent, E. (2011). A work behavior analysis of executive coaches. *International*

   *Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring,* 9(2). Retreived from:

   http://www.business.brookes.ac.uk/research/areas/coachingandmentoring/

O'Neill, M. B. (2000). *Executive coaching with backbone and heart.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking. (2014, December 9). Retrieved from:

   http://www.coachfederation.org

Perinbanayagam, R. (2012). *Identities moments: The self in action and interaction.* Lanham:

   Lexington Books.

Rogers, J. (2012) *Coaching skills: A handbook*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Ruane, S.G. (2013). "Coaching the self: Identity work(ing) and the self-employed professional"

   *Dissertations.* Paper 703. Retreived from:

   http://scholarworks.umass.edu/open_access_dissertations

Swann, W. B. Jr. (1987). Identity negotiation: Where two roads meet. *Journal of Personality and*

   *Social Psychology*, 53, 1038-1051. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.53.6.1038

Swann, W., Johnson, R., and Bosson, J. (2009). Identity negotiation at work. *Research in*

   *Organizational Behavior,* 29, 81-109. doi:10.1016/j.riob.2009.06.005

Tracy, S. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis,*

   *communicating impact.* New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell

Wieland, S. (2010). Ideal selves as resources for the situated practice of identity. *Management*

   *Communication Quarterly,* 24(4), 503-528. doi:10.1077/0893318910374938

Williams, R. (2003). "Consultobabble" and the client-consultant relationship. *Managerial*

   *Auditing Journal,* 18(2), 134-139. doi:10.1108/02686900310455128

**Appendix A – Interview Questions for Individual Nurses**

*Introduction:* "Hi, I'm Scott Shank, a student in the School of Communication at Western Michigan University. Thank you for agreeing to help me with my honor's thesis. This research is intended to identify communication behaviors of professional coaches and understand how the coaching process affects a client's identity. Study findings will be used to develop a report for the Lee Honors College at Western Michigan University. Study findings will also be converted to a conference paper and submitted to a professional communication meeting.

This interview should take 90 minutes of your time. There are no right or wrong answers. Please change details as you discuss so that you or your clients cannot be identified.

Before we begin, I will review the informed consent document and answer any questions. Your signature on this document indicates that you choose to participate in the study, you agree to keep confidential any information that comes out in this interview, and you agree to be recorded. **(Review informed consent document.)** If you do not wish to participate, we will conclude our meeting. Thank you for coming."

"To get started, I will ask you a few general questions about coaching."

Topic 1 – The Coaching Process

1. Why did you become a professional coach? What is your career path up to this point?

2. Describe your philosophy of coaching. How do you exemplify your philosophy in your communication with clients **[probe for examples]**

3. Describe a typical coaching session. What do you say or do at the start, middle, and conclusion of the session.

"I'm particularly interested in how coaching promotes clients' role identity transformation—how clients change and/or transition into new roles (e.g., new careers, leadership opportunities). This next set of questions pertains to specific coaching communication techniques."

Topic 2 Coaching and Client Identity

1. What common topics do clients most often discuss in their coaching sessions with you? Why are they seeking your help?

2. What do clients commonly struggle with as they consider life/professional changes?

3. What coaching strategies have you employed to help a client negotiate a new role and/or transition? What do you say or do? **[probe for specific communication techniques]**

4. Recall a time when a coaching conversation led to a change in the way the client perceived him or herself. What type of questions did you ask, what feedback did you give, etc. that contributed to the change? **[probe for multiple examples]**

5. Recall a time when you coached a client through a challenging transition. How did your communication affect their sense of identity? **[probe for multiple examples]**

6. In coaching sessions, what do you notice in the client's communication that shows they have experienced a shift in how they perceive themselves? How do you respond?

7. How does the communication in a coaching conversation affect how the client interacts with others, such as subordinates/coworkers/leaders**? [probe for multiple examples]**

8. Is there anything that I haven't asked, that you would like to talk about?

*Conclusion*: Thank you again for meeting with me. I appreciate your time and willingness to help. Within the next two weeks you will a copy of the interview transcript to look over and review. This provides you an opportunity to comment, clarify, and elaborate if needed. If you have any questions along the way, you may contact Dr. Apker or me by email. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Appendix B – Codebook**

RQ1. What role does the coaching process play in facilitating client identity?

RQ2. What role does the coaching process play in facilitating coach identity?

| Code | |
|------|------|
| 1. CCB | Coach Communication behaviors |
| 2. C Phil | Coaching Philosophy |
| 3. C Bkd | Coach Background/Identity |
| 4. Exp Clnt | Expectations of Clients |
| 5. Bndry | Boundaries Distinguishing Coaching Process |
| 6. CTop | Coaching Topics |

**CCB = Coach Communication Behaviors**
Code consists of the particular things coaches say or do during coaching conversations to assist the client in reaching their desired outcome (asking questions, listening, direct statements, observations, facilitating/not telling, etc.).
- C01: Communication in our coaching conversations includes powerful questions to evoke processing and clarity. Active listening is also a key component to communication. My questions won't make sense if I don't actively listen.
- C01:I'll say, "You know, I'm taking off my coaching hat right now. So this is not coaching, but I really feel like I want to share an insight I have. If it fits, keep it. If it doesn't, throw it back."
- C01:I listen for a pattern of words and if I hear words used repetitively, that's where I'll go.
- C01: Any observation I make, I try to hold it loosely. Not, "You need to listen to what I'm saying!" It's a risk, but sometimes we have to take that risk for their benefit, not for mine.  I also need to know when not to say something, and I've got to withhold that.
- C02: I really believe that wide open questions can be really powerful. Sometimes the use of metaphor as well, can be really powerful.
- C02: I'm relaxed and ready to let go of any suggestions I might have, any advice I might have to give them, and I'm listening and asking a lot of great questions that can help them get to the core of their answers.
- C03: I do use a lot of metaphor and visuals to help my clients understand my philosophy of coaching.
- C03: I would say, "I'm going to take off my coach's hat off and put on my mentor hat because I was in this situation myself and this is how I dealt with it. It wasn't a good decision because... or it worked out really well because...
- C03: I used to give bird ladders. There about $3 a piece, and I would give them to people as tools for measurement.
- C03: You try to break it down into objectives and into specific goals that are measurable and observable.
- C03: At the beginning of the coaching session you get clarity around the subject matter. It's kind of vague, so you drill down so you understand, at the end of the hour, what's going to give them value because coaching is their agenda.

- C03: I always ask, "Can I give you some feedback? I'm having a hit here on an idea and you can tell me if I'm on the right track or not."
- C03: There's something we call "clearing" in coaching. I've had client that get on the phone and I can tell they're stressed. First of all I'll say, "Is this still a good time for you?" If they say yes I'll say, "It sounds like you have something on your mind. It's probably best for you to clear that before we move on." Then you can give them a minute or whatever to rant and rave about something.
- C03: When I think of competencies in coaching related to communication, one is direct communication. We are expected on many occasions to be direct in the way we exchange with our clients.

## C Phil = Coaching Philosophy
Code consists of individual coaching philosophies of professional coaches that inform their coaching process and influence how they communicate to clients (holistic, behavioral).
- C01: It's a trusting relationship between two people where the coach serves as the thought partner, honors the client as the expert. Part of my philosophy is if I discover a person is more prone to needing counseling, rather than coaching, I would honor them.
- C01: I was trained to not prepare for a coaching session.
- C01: I try to not coach the problem; I try to coach the person. A lot of times if you can get to the heart of the issue, the problem itself will be resolved.
- C02: My personal philosophy, although I think I have to work at it continually, is believing that the clients I work with are completely whole and smart, able to become whatever it is they need to become to be the best they can be.
- C03: My philosophy about coaching is to take my clients to the area where they don't know what others are seeing and they don't know what they don't know. It is in those areas where real solutions and paradigm shifts occurs.
- C03:I'm very much a believer in strengths-based coaching. You want to understand what your clients' strengths are and leverage them. I find the biggest transformations occur when they learn about blind spots or they learn about solutions that never occurred to them.
- C03: One thing I like to help leaders with is to not only identify what they need to do but also identify how they need to be. I think every leader needs to have two lists every day. One is their to-do list. The other is their how-to-be list. How do I want to be today? I want to be trustworthy. I want to be accessible. I want to be visible. I want to be full of recognition. Everyone focuses on the to-do list and not on the to-be list. That is another standard thing I incorporate into my coaching.

## C Back = Coach Background/Identity
Code consists of references made to the coach's personal/professional background that influences their coaching approach (faith based nonprofit, executive leadership, education, health care, counseling, etc.).
- C01: I coach mostly (not only but mostly) nonprofit leaders and executives.
- C02: I had been an executive the few years before I became a coach. I was looking for something that would allow me to stay in this area but still pay a decent wage. I came across coaching. I knew a little about it but not much. It was like lightning had hit me. It

was absolutely... I felt like it took all of the things I learned in my business life and put them into work that would be meaningful for me.

- C02: I started at the ___ company, now about 35-36 years ago. I stayed at ___company for that entire time, for those 25 years. I moved around and moved up and did a lot of different things up until the time I left.
- C03: I became a professional coach after working in health care for twenty-some years, not as a clinician but more on the administrative side. I entered into public relations, and migrated into leadership positions in strategic planning and strategic development. That migrated into education.

**Exp Clnt = Expectations of Client**
Code consists of the expectations of how a client is to communicate in order to demonstrated active engagement in the coaching process (commitment to the relationship, vulnerability, trust, provides content of conversations, accountability, agreement on coaching boundaries, willingness to verbalize, openness, etc.).

- C01: If it's a newer client and they are new to coaching, they are going to be all over the board. If it's someone I've been coaching for a long period of time, they'll know how to narrow it down.
- C01: I'll have them name what they want to walk away with. That is what we call in coaching a "conversational agreement" because we have to have an agreement that we're both going to honor. That's the goal that we have set.
- C01: As one of the competencies that we honor as coaches is (it's one of the first three competencies) having a trust and an intimacy in the relationship. There's got to be enough trust.
- C01: In coaching, you become very vulnerable. You have to be willing to be vulnerable.
- C02: If you're truly coaching, in the way I described it, it really does take a partnership. Often my clients are asked to work with a coach because they're in a high-potential program or they're considered for a CEO position, and their boss knows there are some things that need to be worked on. That doesn't mean they're broken. That just means, like all of us, there are things they need to work on to get there. If the boss hires a coach, how invested is that person going to be?
- C02: For someone to really see a difference in their life and their work, it takes engagement. If they're not willing to fully engage, the result they receive will be measured. It may not be as great at they expected or as great as their manager expected. That's not to say there isn't bad coaching out there too. There is bad coaching out there. But if the coach is really doing their part, and the other person doesn't engage, then the results won't be what everyone would like them to be.
- C03: They need to move toward action with a goal to identify one or two obtainable action items they can complete before the next coaching session.
- C03: So if you want to be a good communicator or a good listener, you do it deliberately as well. It's not going to become automatic and natural. In fact, it's going to be unnatural until you do it deliberately and it starts to become more automatic.

**Bndry = Boundaries of what coaching is and isn't**
Code consists of communication employed for the purpose of clarifying the nature of the

coaching process and distinguishing coaching communication from other helping services such as consulting, counseling, therapy, etc. (clarification, information giving, explanation, etc.).

- C01: Counseling goes into a person's past and brings them from the past to the present so they can function normally in the present. A counselor would deal with unhealthy issues, with unhealthy people.
- C01: First, when I engage a client, I send them an agreement that spells out the difference between coaching and counseling and mentoring and consulting.
- C01: I'm taking off my coaching hat right now. So this is not coaching, but I really feel like I want to share an insight I have. If it fits, keep it. If it doesn't, throw it back." Then I'll identify when I'm putting my coaching hat back on so they know which identity.
- C02: Usually consulting is the one my clients understand. In consulting, the consultant knows what to do and dictates what needs to be done. That stands in stark contrast to coaching which is eliciting the answers from the client.
- C02: Oh no, I almost always have to explain. I think part of that is because the waters have become muddied in the coaching world, particularly in the executive and leadership ranks that I work in.  There are a lot of consultants who have hung up a shingle. They continue their consulting in a one-on-one manner with the client. It gets confusing because they're expecting me to tell them what to do. Sometimes we have to have that discussion more than once, but it's part of our agreement at the front end. In fact, if they're interviewing me before they decide to work with me (which happens most often), I let them know that my style is much more based in inquiry and observation than it is in advice or consulting.
- C02: I have to take off my coaching hat to teach them, but those aren't the ones I'm necessarily talking about.
- C03: A key part of one of our competencies is co-creating the relationship with the client. You have to make clear to them what coaching is and is not. We have to be very clear that we are not their consultants. We are not there to provide expertise. We believe the solutions reside in our clients. That's the first thing. We're also not counselors. In fact, we're ethically bound to refer clients we think may need counseling because coaching is all about moving forward.
- C03: "I'm going to take off my coach's hat off and put on my mentor hat because I was in this situation myself and this is how I dealt with it.

**Topics = Topics discussed in coaching sessions**
Code consists of the topics relevant to identity construction discussed during coaching conversations between coach and client (transitions, self-confidence, 360 feedback, perceptions of others, organizational change, roles, etc.)

- C01: "I just need more confidence that the decision I'm making is going to be a good one." I could look at the decision or I could look at the lack of confidence.
- C01: The ones I deal with are interacting with other people and knowing when to transition, when to leave, when to stay, how to hire somebody, how do I deal with someone lacking integrity, and more interpersonal relationships.
- C01: A young gal I was coaching was in a rehabilitation program. They had asked me to coach her through the process of leaving the program and getting back into society.  Our first conversation, she mentioned the name of the organization (which I will not). "ABC organization, they put you through a program and they throw you to the dogs." I

thought, "That's extreme." But I felt compelled that I shouldn't say. I sensed that she was her own destructive dog, but something inside told me, "Don't tell her that because she's not ready to receive that." So in our ensuing conversations I'd go back and visit, "so who are the dogs?" "Well the dogs are my old drug dealers." The next time, "The dogs are my parents." The next time, "The dogs are my old friends." Finally, the last time we met she said, "I've been doing a lot of thinking. I'm leaving next week, and I realize I am my own destructive dog."

- C01: I was coaching a doctor who wanted to leave a hospital and open an inner-city clinic.
- C01: So whatever that core value is, I think we need to help people honor those core values. Otherwise they're living an inconsistent life
- C02: I'll do stakeholder interviews. If someone is coming into a new position, it's always a good thing for me to talk to their manager, talk to HR if HR is involved, or the organizational development or talent management people about expectations.
- C02: Most of those topics have to do with interpersonal relationships. If you think about the ones that I named, almost all of those impact interpersonal relationships. The lens I see coaching through is through relationships. When people ask me what I do, I say "I help you have better relationships with people around you."
- C03: With most of the people I coach, the issues they bring to coaching are people related. Either it's their own conflict with someone or dealing with, conflict as a manger in their department, or team morale.
- C03: That transition from bedside nurse to manager/supervisor is huge. I've seen many unsuccessful transitions. That's a particular transition and bridge that I understand with the clinical community.
- C03: I have a manager's focus as more transactional and a leader's as more transformational. At the beginning of the program, mid program, and at the end of the program I have colored dots for them to map where they are anonymously with this group of 25-30 people. They get to map where they are in five areas.
- C03: When hospitals implement electronic medical records, it's such a huge and profound change. A huge issue for us as coaches is helping leaders get through change themselves to help their staff get through change.
- C03: I also get managers who are emotional, can't manage their composure, or they don't deal well with the emotions that are presented to them. People think you don't bring your emotions to work, but that bologna because it's everywhere.
- C03: People I've coached who have had issues with their teams and have started to use powerful questions in their conversations and staff meeting have been really happy with the results. One woman said it turned around her team. They started deciding how else can we make our staff meeting more interesting and they started getting more creative.

**Exemplary Stories of Identity Transformation**
One gentleman I coached was very, very introverted, but he was the Chief Operating Officer of the hospital. Based on a 360 he got feedback on, he found out from peers and direct reports that he was perceived as mean, unavailable, and all he cared about was money. It was all because of his demeanor, just his presence. We had to work on getting him to make eye contact in the hallway. Now this was a Chief Operating Officer of a huge medical center, but it was so unnatural for him to do these things. In order for him to remember we came up with putting pennies in his pocket. We were working on basic things like eye contact and saying hello in the hallway. He was appalled and horrified when he realized how he was being perceived. The goal was to get comfortable going up to nursing floors and rounding. He said, "I'd rather stick needles in my eye than go and have chit chat with people." He was a pharmacist before, and he wasn't a people person. And he wasn't going to become a people person, but he could still learn the behaviors. He put pennies in his pocket, and said, "I guess I can smile at three people today." It was sort of a joke at first, but then he started getting a different response from people. People started coming into his office and saying, "This is a concern," and bringing issues that could impact cost containment or resources. It was a real positive. I still hear from him. He said, "While I still fall back into some old habits, I'm fifty percent more friendly than I used to be."

Another woman I was helping grieve after accepting the fact she was now a Chief Nursing Officer with a completely different role than she had. I said, "You're having a hard time letting go, what can we do to help you let go? What would symbolize that?" She said, "Well, the pin that I earn when I graduated nursing school." I said, "What would be a way to pay respect to this incredible career you've had that will help you move on?" She ended up putting it in a jewelry box and putting it in a draw in a ceremonious way. This was over the phone. Those are ones I remember and many of the clients I know they remember. It was a point in time in the coaching that helped them move forward to create a new identity of see something new in themselves.

**Appendix C – Memos**

**Coach Communication Behaviors Memo**

**Description**
Coaches use specific communication behaviors during sessions with clients to assist the client in moving forward in their personal-development initiatives. Coaches ask questions to help the client set the agenda for the conversation, narrow down a focus, clarify, explore options and potential solutions, create action steps, and process self-accountability. They demonstrate concentrated listening to discern themes, speech patterns, and inconsistencies. Using direct statements, coaches provide feedback to synthesize and repeat themes the client has shared, challenge assumptions, and point out inconsistencies or a noticed lack of self-accountability. The purpose of coach communication during the coaching session is to draw the issues, obstacles, solutions, and goals out of the client. The coach's goal for their questions and direct statement is to facilitate client self-awareness, learning, goal setting, and action.

**Inclusionary criteria:**
Asking powerful questions, listening, direct statements, concise messages, asking permission before sharing an insight, listening for changes in tone of voice, excitement, energy.

**Exclusionary criteria:**
Advice giving, asking leading questions, asking questions due to personal interest, Asking leading questions, analytic or evaluative communication.

**Illustrative Examples**
- C01: Communication in our coaching conversations includes powerful questions to evoke processing and clarity. Active listening is also a key component to communication. My questions won't make sense if I don't actively listen.
- C01:I'll say, "It sounds like you have a lot of stuff going on." I'll try to echo back some of what they shared. Then I'll ask a question that really narrows it down. If you picture an hourglass, the narrow part of the hourglass. "You've brought a lot of stuff to the table. At the end of the conversation, what is it that you would like to walk away with? What would be the most valuable or what would be a great outcome for you if this is the area we talk about?"
- C01:I listen for a pattern of words and if I hear words used repetitively, that's where I'll go.
- C01: Any observation I make, I try to hold it loosely. Not, "You need to listen to what I'm saying!" It's a risk, but sometimes we have to take that risk for their benefit, not for mine.  I also need to know when not to say something, and I've got to withhold that.
- C02: I really believe that wide open questions can be really powerful. Sometimes the use of metaphor as well, can be really powerful.
- C02: I'm relaxed and ready to let go of any suggestions I might have, any advice I might have to give them, and I'm listening and asking a lot of great questions that can help them get to the core of their answers.
- C03: I always ask, "Can I give you some feedback? I'm having a hit here on an idea and you can tell me if I'm on the right track or not."

- C03: When I think of competencies in coaching related to communication, one is direct communication. We are expected on many occasions to be direct in the way we exchange with our clients.

**Conditions (antecedents) under which it arises, is maintained, and changes:**
Questions to set the agenda are most common at the beginning of the conversation or when the client is unsure about what to talk about. They ensure the content and direction of the session is decided by the client.

Concise messages are used to echo back what the client has stated. These behaviors show the client the coach is actively listening, are typically used to help the client narrow down the focus, and are followed by further questions.
Powerful questions are those used to help the client experience an "aha" moment. They occur after the client has had a decent amount of time to talk. They are open-ended questions that tend to challenge an assumption, require a new perspective, or get to the heart of an issue.

Direct statement can often be confrontational in nature.  They are used when the coach notices an issue that needs to be brought into the light, potentially one the client talks around and doesn't want to address. Coaches tend to ask permission before giving a direct statement. This behavior is reserved for a time after trust has been established in the coaching relationship.

**Consequences**
1. Coach communication behaviors create a client-centered conversation. Coaches who master these communication competencies are able to draw out solutions, expertise, etc. from within the client.
2. How coach communication behaviors are enacted is what sets coaching apart from counseling, consulting, and other forms of helping services.
3. When coach communication behaviors are enacted well, it creates a transformation environment where the client is safe to explore who they are, their attitudes, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships.
4. Coaching communication behaviors create a culture of action and accountability.

**Relationship to other codes**
- Coach communication behaviors are tied to coaching philosophy. Consultants may use questions, direct statements, etc., but the coach's communication respects and honors the client as the expert.
- While the three coaches' communication behaviors are extremely similar, the language each coach uses appear to be influenced from their personal background and identity.
- The expectations placed on clients influence the coaching process and the communication behaviors found in coaching conversations.  Clients are expected to be engaged with the coach and often learn and begin using communication behaviors modeled by the coaching during coaching sessions.
- For some coaches, communication behaviors appear to be independent from the content (coaching topics). Two of three coaches mentioned not changing communication strategies based on the topic the client discussed. Coach Two does not prepare for sessions ahead of time and mentioned not needing to have any background on the client's situation to be

effective. Coach Three had particular frameworks she used depending on the situation the client was dealing with (change and transitions vs. leadership development).

**Hypotheses about the code:**
Communication behaviors in coaching sessions are not simply to help clients talk about work-related issues; they create a discussion where clients can try on new selves. It could be viewed as a "dressing room" in Goffman's backstage, for actors to explore, practice, and receive feedback on new behaviors (work on their script) before going on the front stage in their workplace. Coach Two mentioned young, potential executives are sent to her to be "polished" and to learn "presence."

Although the word identity is not used often, coaching seems to be primarily about client identity. Coach Three stated coaching is not just about the to-do list, but the "how-to-be list." When clients focus on how to be, often their to-do list may actually get shorter. Coach One stated she "does not coach the problem, she coaches the person." All three coaches seem interested in more than problem solving. They patiently listen in coaching sessions, waiting for the opportunity to ask a powerful question to leads to what they call a "shift" or "aha moment." The client is one powerful question away from looking at their situation from a new perspective, gaining self-awareness of a gap between how they perceive themselves and how others see them, etc.

Coach One shared a story about how a modest direct statement caused a man to recognize the pride that had been having a strong, negative impact on his life. He claims this coaching conversation changed his life.

Coach Three often assists in the transition from Professional Contributor to Manager to Leader in health care contexts. Coach communication can be a catalyst for clients in role-identity change.

**Negative Cases:**
Coach Three is often hired to teach/train groups of organizational leaders. Some of her stories sounded as though she took a more direct approach than descriptions from the other two coaches. She did refer to "hat switching," where she will verbally acknowledge when she switches from the role of coach to the role of mentor/consultant. The context of hat switching was in one-on-one coaching sessions. It is unclear how she navigates coach communication behaviors during group training sessions when she may need to communicate to teach, impart expertise, etc., which would not fit within the boundaries of coach communication behaviors.

Coach One mentioned a client who was not engaged and therefore the coach communication behaviors did not elicit the change typically associated with coaching. However, after several sessions, they decided to terminate the coaching relationship.

**Coach Background/Identity Memo**

**Description**
Code consists of references by coaches to their professional background, or other identity markers such as affiliations, education, roles, interests, etc. All three coaches possess Professional Coach Credential (PCC) and share in common their affiliation to the International Coach Federation. However, the professional backgrounds of each coach are different. One coach is an ordained pastor and most of her clients come from the nonprofit sector. Another coach was an executive of a large company and coaches mostly business leaders and executives. The third coach has 25 years experience working in training and development in the health care industry.

**Inclusionary criteria:**
Communication that expresses individual identification with particular groups, organizations, fields of study, etc.

**Exclusionary criteria:**
Indirect inferences made about the personalities, socio-economic status, race, gender, etc. of the coaches.

**Illustrative Examples**
- C01: I am an ordained minister. So I've been involved in ministry or working with nonprofits all my life. I'm involved in the church…Most of what I've done up to this point has been working in the nonprofit realm.
- C01: I coach mostly (not only but mostly) nonprofit leaders and executives.
- C02: I had been an executive the few years before I became a coach. I was looking for something that would allow me to stay in this area but still pay a decent wage. I came across coaching. I knew a little about it but not much. It was like lightning had hit me. It was absolutely... I felt like it took all of the things I learned in my business life and put them into work that would be meaningful for me.
- C02: I started at the ___ company, now about ___ years ago. I stayed at ___company for that entire time, for those ___ years. I moved around and moved up and did a lot of different things up until the time I left.
- C03: I became a professional coach after working in health care for twenty-some years, not as a clinician but more on the administrative side. I entered into public relations, and migrated into leadership positions in strategic planning and strategic development. That migrated into education.

**Conditions (antecedents) under which it arises, is maintained, and changes:**
Communication about the coaches' background/identity does not often come up in coaching conversations. A potential client may seek information about the coach's background prior to or near the beginning of the coaching relationship. Coach Two noted that many clients have chosen her as a coach because of her professional background. Since coaches are process experts, they do not have to rely on understanding the content, culture, etc. of the organizational context to be effective.

**Consequences**
1. Communication about coach background/identity may cause clients to perceive them as being more credible.
2. A coach's background/identity may affect the vocabulary and language used in coaching sessions to match with language used in their background's particular cultural context.
3. Communicating about coach background/identity may build rapport when coaching clients from similar backgrounds, and help foster trust as someone who has "been there before."

**Relationship to other codes**
- Coach background/identity may influence some coach communication behaviors or preferred frameworks used in coaching.
- ICF background seems to cause uniformity in coach philosophy embraced by all three coaches.
- Expectations on Clients do not seem to change must based on the coach's background/identity.
- Coach background/identity does not appear to the communication articulating the boundaries between coaching, counseling, and consulting.

**Hypotheses about the code:**
A coach's background/identity may influence sub-philosophies such as a holistic approach compared to strictly work/professional coaching.

Coach background/identity may also influence the type of language used to describe their coaching. During the interviews, the ordained-pastor coach used the word "person" 28 times compared to the executive and organizational development coaches who used it only 15 times. The executive used the word "behavior" 9 times compared to the pastor's 1. The word "work" was used 22 & 24 times by the exec. and org. development coaches while only 14 times by the pastor coach.

The background/identity of the coach is also an important attribute in client selection. All three coaches mentioned coaching primarily in the organizational context they had worked in, and receiving new clients through word of mouth. Coach Two stated that many clients choose her over other coaches because of her prior status as an executive.

The fact that all three coaches are credentialed through the ICF, thus sharing a uniform philosophy of coaching, may be a limiting factor in the study since it does not allow for the analysis of whether coaching background/identity is a salient indicator of coach philosophy. Further studies may be interested in comparing coach philosophy of ICF credentialed coaches with non-ICF coaches to explore the similarities and differences of coaching philosophy and communication behaviors.

**Negative Cases:**
A case could be made that a well-trained coach will not be influenced by their past background/identity. It is clear that all three coaches rely most heavily on the training they received through ICF programs.

## Coaching Philosophy Memo

**Description**
Code consists of communication that expresses the philosophical foundations behind coaching. Coaching philosophy has its unique set of assumptions and values, yet sub-philosophies exist that may distinguish individual coaches. One value shared by all three coaches is to respect and honor the client as the expert. Coaches believe clients are healthy, whole, and capable of becoming the person they desire to be. This means that although the coach may be the expert in processes of communication, learning, leadership, etc., the client is treated as the content expert. This empowers the client and relieves the coach from having to give advice, provide solutions, etc. All of that is drawn out of the client.

Coaching is also future oriented. It is not concerned with exploring the clients past, but with discovering options and possibilities of the future. If a client begins spending too much time talking about the past, a coach may recommend they discuss those issue with a counselor.

Sub-philosophies include particular preferences of individual coaches such as coaching the whole person (a holistic approach) vs. coaching primarily around work/professional development. Coach One's communication reveals a more holistic approach of "not coaching the problem (issue) but coaching the person. Coach Two's coaching, on the other hand, remains within the sphere of behavior change to enhance professional development.

When asked about coaching philosophy, coaches sometimes provided "frameworks," These are tools used in coaching sessions to assist the client by providing a frame to explore a particular issue or topic. Frameworks include Johari's Window, Change/transition models, hourglass model, etc.

**Inclusionary criteria:**
Communication such as, "I coach the person." Clients need to not just have a to-do list, but a "how-to-be list." Affirmation of clients being whole, smart, capable.

**Exclusionary criteria:**
Specific frameworks used as a tactical lens to assist the client in their exploration of a topic. Coaching styles, such as personality, professional/relational communication preference, etc.

**Illustrative Examples**
- C01: It's a trusting relationship between two people where the coach serves as the thought partner, honors the client as the expert.
- C01: I try to not coach the problem; I try to coach the person. A lot of times if you can get to the heart of the issue, the problem itself will be resolved.
- C02: My personal philosophy, although I think I have to work at it continually, is believing that the clients I work with are completely whole and smart, able to become whatever it is they need to become to be the best they can be.
- C03: One thing I like to help leaders with is to not only identify what they need "to do" but also identify "how they need to be." I think every leader needs to have two lists every day. One is their to-do list. The other is their how-to-be list. How do I want to be today?

- C01: In coaching we'll take a person from where they are now and move them forward into the future, dealing with people that are relatively healthy and ready to move forward. So very seldom in coaching (some coaches may disagree), but very seldom do I go into the past. I'm not going to say, "How did your mother treat you or how long have you felt this way?" but it's more dealing in healthy areas. I do have a couple of clients that also see a counselor and they coach with me, but we have an agreement, and we know exactly where the line where health ends and un-health begins. The client will say, "This is something I need to talk to my counselor about." So then the counselor, who is trained, can go back.

**Conditions (antecedents) under which it arises, is maintained, and changes:**
Communication about coaching philosophy is often addressed early on in the coaching relationship to establish agreement and set expectations. Once the client is clear on how coaching is different from counseling or consulting, communication about coaching philosophy is less frequent. If a client begins taking the conversation into an area outside of the boundaries of coaching, a coach may say, "This may be something you would want to talk to a counselor about."

**Consequences**
1. Communication about coaching philosophy sets expectations and paves the way for the discovery, learning, and awareness to take place in the client.
2. Communicating about philosophy helps the client understand their role in the coaching relationship.
3. Communicating about philosophy affirms and empowers the client by demonstrating the coach's belief that the client is healthy, whole, and capable of providing solutions to their own problems.

**Relationship to other codes**
- Coaching philosophy informs coach communication behavior, expectations of the client, and the boundaries distinguishing coaching form counseling, consulting, etc.
- Sub-philosophies within coaching can be influenced by the coach's personal background/identity.
- Coaching philosophy limits the breadth of coaching topics. Since it is assumed the client is healthy, whole, and capable, topics dealing with the past, or issues of unhealthy will not be discussed. The coach will refer the client to discuss these issues with a counselor.

**Hypotheses about the code:**
Coaching philosophy puts clients in the driver's seat of their own development. When clients are treated as experts of their lives (content) and coaches as experts in processes of learning and development, a transformational context is formed that promoted client identity construction. Coaching is future oriented and is about the continuous process of reaching potential (potentiating). Words like change, being, potential, becoming, etc. are common in describing what happens in coaching. All of these words are implicitly about identity.

There are sub-philosophies within the general philosophy of coaching. For example, coaching as holistic/personal vs. behavioral focused/work related. Individual coaches may embrace particular sub-philosophies due to the influence of their personal background/identity upon the their style

of coaching. The professional/holistic sub-philosophies could be viewed as a continuum, where each coach resides at their own particular place.

**Negative Cases:**
There may be challenges in demonstrating a pure coaching philosophy within group settings. There was a distinction coaches made between one-on-one coaching sessions and a "coach approach" toward leading, managing, etc.

C03: You'll hear things like "coach approach." That's leaning towards a leadership style that comes from a place from inviting engagement and dialogue and asking the right questions to get solutions from others.

If a business is paying a lot of money to have a coach visit for training, they will probably want content taught/imparted. In this setting, it appears coaches still attempt to stay true to coach philosophy, but the coaching is not the same as what occurs in one-to-one sessions.

**Boundaries Distinguishing Coaching Memo**

**Description**
Coaching often gets confused with other helping services such as counseling, consulting, etc. Coaches frequently communication to clarify what coaching is and is not. All three coaching referred to having to articulate and define coaching to clients.

Coaching is not counseling because it assumes health and wholeness and does not focus on the past. Counseling takes a person from unhealth to a place of health by exploring the past and facilitating healing. Coaching takes a healthy person into the future, assisting them in reaching their potential and achieving goals and action plans.

Consulting is when a person with expertise is called on to share that expertise with the client. Consultants are looked to for answers and solutions. Coaching on the other hand, respects the client as the one possessing the expertise, answers, and solutions. The coach's expertise is in learning, communication, and development processes, which help the coach to draw out the content from the client thus facilitating the transformation.

Coaches almost always have to explain the difference to new clients. There may not be a single definition of coaching, but many people understand coaching by what it is not. The ambiguous definition makes articulate what coaching is not that much more important in communicating its value.

**Inclusionary criteria:**
Communication that creates boundaries by comparing and contrasting coaching with other helping interventions. References that point out how coaching is distinct.

**Exclusionary criteria:**
Boundaries within the coaching relationship between coach and client.

**Illustrative Examples**
- C01: Counseling goes into a person's past and brings them from the past to the present so they can function normally in the present. A counselor would deal with unhealthy issues, with unhealthy people.
- C01: First, when I engage a client, I send them an agreement that spells out the difference between coaching and counseling and mentoring and consulting.
- C01: I'm taking off my coaching hat right now. So this is not coaching, but I really feel like I want to share an insight I have. If it fits, keep it. If it doesn't, throw it back." Then I'll identify when I'm putting my coaching hat back on so they know which identity.
- C02: Usually consulting is the one my clients understand. In consulting, the consultant knows what to do and dictates what needs to be done. That stands in stark contrast to coaching which is eliciting the answers from the client.
- C02: Oh no, I almost always have to explain. I think part of that is because the waters have become muddied in the coaching world, particularly in the executive and leadership ranks that I work in. There are a lot of consultants who have hung up a shingle. They continue their consulting in a one-on-one manner with the client. It gets confusing because they're

expecting me to tell them what to do. Sometimes we have to have that discussion more than once, but it's part of our agreement at the front end. In fact, if they're interviewing me before they decide to work with me (which happens most often), I let them know that my style is much more based in inquiry and observation than it is in advice or consulting.

- C03: A key part of one of our competencies is co-creating the relationship with the client. You have to make clear to them what coaching is and is not. We have to be very clear that we are not their consultants. We are not there to provide expertise. We believe the solutions reside in our clients. That's the first thing. We're also not counselors. In fact, we're ethically bound to refer clients we think may need counseling because coaching is all about moving forward.
- C03: "I'm going to take off my coach's hat off and put on my mentor hat because I was in this situation myself and this is how I dealt with it.

**Conditions (antecedents) under which it arises, is maintained, and changes:**
Communication about boundaries distinguishing coaching occurs in the beginning of the relationship.  A coach will articulate what coaching is and contrast it with counseling, consulting, etc. prior to the first coaching session, often in print as part of the contract.

In situations when the client may be veering into the past (counseling) or asking the coach to provide the answer or solution (consulting), a coach will communication to reiterate the distinction of coaching and an assist the client in staying within the bounds of coaching.  If the coach feels the client would need/benefit from visiting a professional counseling, they are ethical bound to refer them.

**Consequences**
1. Setting clear boundaries keep the clients in a position to leverage the growth and development coaching provides.
2. Setting clear boundaries helps the client to understand whether coaching is a good fit for them or whether they would rather benefit from another helping service.
3. Setting clear boundaries informs the coach's role, ensuring the coach keeps his/her coaching hat on and does not veer into counseling, advice giving, problem solving behaviors.

**Relationship to other codes**
- Communication to distinguish coaching is directly connected to coaching philosophy.  The unique philosophy sets it apart from other interventions.
- Communicating boundaries makes the coach's identity salient in the coaching process. It causes the coach to be cognizant of which "hat" they have on.
- Communicating boundaries helps the coach ensure their communication behaviors stay within the role of coach.
- Communicating boundaries helps provide explanation of what coaching is by stating what it is not. With the ambiguity and lack of consensus on a single definition of coaching philosophy, this is a useful communication strategy.
- Communicating boundaries serves as a filter to keep the topics discussed in coaching focused on developmental goals and future options and possibilities.

**Hypotheses about the code:**
Communicating boundaries to distinguish coaching from other interventions is a useful strategy used by coaching to frame the relationship, solidify the roles of the coach and client, and to provide definition of the coaching process by stating what it is not.

Setting the boundaries also helps the coach to maintain their role and identity as a coach. Having clear distinctions between coaching and consulting allows the coach to say, "I have an insight I'd like to share. May I have your permission to take my coaching hat off and put my consultant hat on?" Statements like these help the coach stay within the defined parameters of their role as coach. It also teach the client what coaching is, thus helping them to engage the coaching process more effectively.

**Negative Cases:**
The interviews do not comprehensibly represent the entire spectrum of people operating as coaches. There are differing opinions on the separation of psychology and coaching. A licensed psychologist/coach may not distinguish the boundaries the same as laid out in ICF training.

**Expectations of Clients Code**

**Description**
Coaching is a trusting relationship between coach and client. Client communication must demonstrate active engagement in the process for coaching to be effective.  This includes commitment to the relationship and a willingness to be honest, open, and vulnerable. The client must be prepared to provide the content to be discussed in sessions, and willing to hold themselves accountable for self-determined goals and action steps that emerge. The Client is explained the difference between coaching and other service, and is expected to agree to the boundaries of coaching. Clients must bring a passion and motivation for growth since the coach cannot be expected to "carry them through" the process.

Coaches pay attention to potential client's communication, taking special interest in whether they perceive the client's willingness to engage the process.  If a client does not show engagement through their communication, attitudes, and commitment to action, the coach may decide to terminate the relationship.

**Inclusionary criteria:**
Communication that describes the expectations coaches place on clients (process expectations). References to engagement, trust, client communication, participation in the coaching process, etc.

**Exclusionary criteria:**
Expectations of coaches and clients of what the end result of coaching will be (outcome expectations).

**Illustrative Examples**
- C01: If it's a newer client and they are new to coaching, they are going to be all over the board. If it's someone I've been coaching for a long period of time, they'll know how to narrow it down.
- C01: I'll have them name what they want to walk away with. That is what we call in coaching a "conversational agreement" because we have to have an agreement that we're both going to honor. That's the goal that we have set.
- C01: As one of the competencies that we honor as coaches is (it's one of the first three competencies) having a trust and an intimacy in the relationship. There's got to be enough trust.
- C01: In coaching, you become very vulnerable. You have to be willing to be vulnerable.
- C02: If you're truly coaching, in the way I described it, it really does take a partnership. Often my clients are asked to work with a coach because they're in a high-potential program or they're considered for a CEO position, and their boss knows there are some things that need to be worked on. That doesn't mean they're broken. That just means, like all of us, there are things they need to work on to get there. If the boss hires a coach, how invested is that person going to be?
- C02: For someone to really see a difference in their life and their work, it takes engagement. If they're not willing to fully engage, the result they receive will be measured. It may not be as great at they expected or as great as their manager expected. That's not to say there isn't

bad coaching out there too. There is bad coaching out there. But if the coach is really doing their part, and the other person doesn't engage, then the results won't be what everyone would like them to be.

- C03: A key part of one of our competencies is co-creating the relationship with the client.
- C03: They need to move toward action with a goal to identify one or two obtainable action items they can complete before the next coaching session.

**Conditions (antecedents) under which it arises, is maintained, and changes:**
Coaches communicate about client expectation up front during a contracting stage. They want to make sure the client understand the coaching process and what they must do to help promote trust and intimacy in the relationship.

Coaches also remind the client of what is expected of them throughout the process, especially if the coach feels they are not following through on actions they have committed to.

Coaches can tell by client communication how engaged they are.  Coaches actively listen to the conversation but also pay attention to the client's tone of voice, emotional energy, etc. If a coach senses the client has a lot on his/her mind at the beginning of a session, the coach will ask the client is this is so, and will recommend a minute or two of "clearing" to allow the client to vent and clear their mind so they can more effectively engage in the coaching process during that session.

**Consequences**
1. Communication about client expectations explains boundaries, roles, and expectations of the relationship.
2. Communication about client expectation serves as foundation to the coaching contract, the agreement between the coach and client.
3. Client communication demonstrates to the coach whether they are actively engaging the process and owning up to their expectations.

**Relationship to other codes**
- Coaching philosophy places the client as the center of the coaching process.  The coach is facilitator, but a lot of what happens from coaching is dependent on the client.
- Boundaries of what coaching is and is not are an important aspect of communicating client expectations. Coaching places different expectations on clients than do counseling and consulting.
- Clients are expected to bring their own coaching topics and not rely on the coach to lead of initiate the content of what will be discussed.
- Coach background/identity does not seem to effect client expectations and responsibilities.
- Coach communication behaviors are important to establish trust, intimacy, and create an environment for the client actively engage.

**Hypotheses about the code:**
The expectations placed on clients promote client identity transformation.  The myth that coaches can "work their magic" to transform an individual's life is misguided.  It is active

engagement on the part of the client along with good coaching that leverages such growth and development.

All three coaches pointed out that accountability trust, and vulnerability are essential in a coaching relationship. It's no surprise that this type of context would promote reflection, self-awareness, and growth.  Coach One stated:

> Yes, there is actually a lot of accountability. You'll know when you engage a coach, the coach is going to ask you some really challenging questions and there's going to be a lot of openness, a lot of truth. If your coach is doing the job well and if you've engaged the same coach for a period of time, the coach may call you on inconsistencies because you've built that trusting relationship. I think you would learn the value of, as Patrick Lencioni says, of "getting naked" which means making yourself vulnerable. You're sort of allowing yourself to be uncovered, and I think that's really helpful for leaders.

**Negative Cases:**
Cases when a company hires a coach to help an underperforming client vs. when the client pursues coaching out of their own motivation.  This happens a lot and does not guarantee an effective outcome.