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Summary* of the Report on the research project:

Development of an instrument for microanalysis of coaching sessions

(Including the result of comparative analysis of typical coaching sessions self-evaluated by coaches from different traditions)

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Why have we decided to do this research?

One of the conditions for coaching to become a professional discipline is the need to develop a body of knowledge and research about our practice. This knowledge starts from the very central questions of what coaching actually is, what are the common elements among and differences between existing types and genres of coaching process and what coaches do in comparison to other types of practices and interventions.

The International Coaching Research Forum in 2008 initiated a process that aimed at addressing these fundamental issues by encouraging researchers all over the world to become part of the research community. The researchers were challenged to address not only their personal interests in coaching but also explore the burning needs of the coaching field.

One of the issues identified by the Coaching Research Forum in 2008 was a lack of a universal instrument that could describe the main elements of the coaching process and allow the measurement of such elements in actual coaching sessions. A number of experienced and internationally renowned researchers and practitioners have suggested that there is a need for the development of a credible research instrument based on rigorous design, development and testing. This instrument could describe the most generic and diverse elements of a coaching session including actual coaching sessions and ideal, prototypical sessions. The applications of such an instrument could include different types of research, for example: comparing and contrasting different coaching genres and traditions, evaluating the effectiveness of coaching process variables and learning about the differences between practices of experienced coaches and novices. It could also be used in coaching training, supervision and the continuing professional development of coaches.

Therefore we decided to produce and test such an instrument through thorough examination of the coaching process from the position of experts in this field. The research began with the review of literature relevant to understanding coaching processes. Then we had to identify an appropriate methodology for this project and to conduct it with the involvement of as many experienced coaches as possible. In the following sections we will describe how we developed the instrument and what the results of initial application of it are.

What is in the coaching literature?

At the time of research the existing literature on coaching process was mainly theoretical. For example, through the use of imagined clients, Palmer and Whybrow (2007) present the views of a diverse range of expert coaches describing how they would facilitate a coaching session. A similar "how to" approach is taken in Stober and Grant (2006). However, Lowman (2005) argued that for recognition of coaching as a psychological discipline we need to carry out research of coaching process beyond case studies.

Some research on coaching process beyond case study has been carried out in Germany (Greif et al, 2010; Grawe et al, 1994; Grawe, 2000; Gassman & Grawe, 2006; Behrendt, 2004; Schmidt & Thamm, 2008). For example, Greif et al (2010) developed a methodology for evaluating behaviours of the coach (e.g. *Esteem and emotional support*, *results oriented problem reflection*, *clarification of goals*). These behaviors were assessed based on the observation by trained raters, when viewing recordings of coaching sessions. Although it was an important step in researching coaching process, the authors acknowledged the challenges presented in analyzing complex behaviors. There instrument was also focused only on the behaviours of the coach.

In the UK De Haan and colleagues (2010) researched *significant moments* that occur during coaching sessions. They explored differences and similarities in perceptions of significant moments for both coaches and their clients. A significant finding in their study was that clients and coaches both shared common perceptions of significant moments occurring in sessions. It could be argued, though, that however significant such critical moments can be they do not represent the session as a whole, if we wish to create a comprehensive description of coaching processes during any particular session.

Another study of interest for analyzing coaching process is by Stein (2009). Through analysis of actual recordings of coaching sessions and interviews Stein identified 16 conversational identities typically employed by a coach (e.g. *agenda facilitator, narrative listener, challenger*, etc). It was an interesting approach and a useful step to understanding how coaches work, however, the level of abstraction in these descriptions would make it difficult to evaluate a coaching session in detail.

In summary, the literature on coaching process is mainly theoretical. The first steps towards understanding of the coaching process through research were made, however this type of research remained limited. In particularly, there seems to be a gap in the literature in terms of research aimed at analyzing a whole coaching session that is a collaborative work between both the coach and the client.

What could be 'borrowed' in this regard from the studies on psychotherapy process?

Much more has been done to understand helping process in our sister field of psychotherapy (Rice and Greenberg, 1984; Siegfried, 1995; Elliott, 2010). Although we could not use these studies in terms of the content, because our practices are different, we could benefit from learning about their methods of studies. Most of the methods that are used to analyze psychotherapy process focus on specific behaviors or events occurring in a session or over a series of sessions rather than provide an analysis of a whole session of therapy. However, one exception to this general approach has been the development and application of the psychotherapy process Q-Set (PQS).

The PQS is a set of 100 descriptors (items) designed to describe the session (Ablon & Jones, 1999). It is used to provide an analysis of a whole therapy session and to identify overall patterns of process. The PQS contains items relating to behaviors (of client, therapist) as well as thoughts, feelings and general patterns of interaction (Ablon & Jones, 1999).

The PQS is based on Q Technique/ Q Methodology (e.g. Stephenson, 1935, 1953) in which participants are typically asked to sort the items from most characteristic to least characteristic of the session. They rank all items into a forced distribution of around 11 categories which allows only a few items to be placed at the extremities of the distribution. The ranking then can be analyzed statistically. A number of interesting studies was conducted using the prototypes of the sessions created by using this instrument (Ablon & Jones, 1998, 2001; Pole, Ablon, & O'Connor, 2008).

The following table 1 illustrates that in psychotherapy research there are two traditions of using Q Methodology. One tradition (e.g. Stenner, Watts & Worrell, 2007; Brown, 1980) makes emphasis on the subjectivity involved in ranking the items. The other tradition (e.g. Block, 2008, Ablon & Jones, 1998, Shedler and Westen, 1998) emphasise the potential

to achieve some objectivity of measurement. The main differences are in the assumption that participants can be trained to a high level of inter-rater reliability and that this is desirable in the interpretation of the findings. Both traditions have a track record of valuable research.

Aspects of the research approach	Traditional Q Methodology (e.g. Stenner, Watts & Worrell, 2007; Brown, 1980)	Application of Q-Technique (e.g. Block, 2008, Ablon & Jones, 1998, Shedler and Westen, 1998)
Aim of Research	To understand the position, viewpoints, feelings and judgments of specific groups of people about a topic of interest about which there are likely to be a diverse range of opinions (e.g. vases, conservation, leadership, metaphor usage on the internet)	To identify the critical elements of variation within clinical practice (domain specificity); to generate prototypes representing diagnostic/ taxonomic categories or to describe therapeutic process; to provide measurements and/or diagnostic assessments
Rationale underpinning development of methodology	Methodological framework for increasing *certainty* of capturing expressions of subjectivity; rejection of hypothetico-deductive tradition (in psychology, initially)	Lack of a common language to describe personality and psychotherapeutic process; need to make comparisons between theory (prototypes) and practice; limitations of existing objective (O data) and/or self report assessments (S data); limitations of outcome studies
Underlying philosophy	Social Constructivist – assumes that the concourse of statements represents the broad discourses in area of interest; sets out to identify *subjectivity* (positions/ viewpoints with respect to these discourses)	Rooted in a Positivist framework– strives to achieve consensual frameworks for understanding and describing therapeutic process and typologies; strives to achieve inter-rater reliability, typical through manuals and training of participants
Development of an Initial list of items	Typically based on gathering and valuing a diverse range of expressed opinions within the area of interest (can be small sample) – items represent the *concourse* (range of ways of talking about/ expressing a domain of interest); part of this domain might include academic theory as elements of relevant discourse; items could be other objects (e.g. pictures, odors, etc)	Experts generate the initial list strictly as a set of statements based on theoretical assumptions and input from practitioners; also based on an extensive survey of the relevant literature
Development of Q Set	A "craft skill" carried out by the researcher – items are broadly reflective of the concourse (not a representative sample); less concern about precise definitions and ambiguities although some effort to minimize duplication*;* 40 – 60 statements typical and sufficient because the way participants sort the items as configurations is what counts	Methodical and iterative process in which a reduced list of items is generated based on theoretical significance, clarity of understanding, careful avoidance of duplication; consultation with experts; 100 statements typical (200 for Shedler-Westen Assessment Procedure) and important as individual items can have clinical significance (positive or negative correlation with a norm); need for comprehensive coverage of specific

		elements of practice/ typology
Q Sorting	Self-referential judgments (own views and options but can include the researcher assuming different positions)	For psychotherapeutic process, carried out by trained observers (e.g. Jones, 2000); subjective clinical judgment important but always in relation to a common understanding of the meaning of the items; for CAQ ; for CACQ and SWAP, Q Sorting can be done by non trained people but as a diagnostic tool or by trained assessors for research purposes
Application of Statistical Analysis and interpretation	Used as a tool to provide a degree of certainty about expressions of *subjectivity*; the emergent factors are represented by *factor exemplifying Q Sort/ factor arrays* (weighted averages of those Q sorts that load onto each factor) which allow the interpretation of the factor by the researcher – the focus of the researcher is on the holistic interpretation of the factor exemplifying Q Sorts; a *reading* rather than an objective truth	As per the Stevenson approach; factor exemplifying Q Sorts are interpreted but in terms of diagnostic or descriptive categories; findings are replicated; the researcher is also interested in identifying individual items that are positively and negatively correlated with a prototype (as individual items can have clinical significance) and to check inter-rater agreement

Table 1   Summary of comparison between two major Q methodologies

We decided that there is a clear benefit to the application of Q methodology in the field of coaching where there is much debate about definitions of coaching and how it differs from related professions. It is widely acknowledged that in coaching there are many traditions, genres and much diversity in the contexts in which coaching takes place. A Q Set representing the broad domain of coaching would provide coaches the opportunity to express their positions on coaching session, actual or typically imagined.

How we decided to approach this project?

We were interested in how coaching practitioners conceptualize and evaluate the coaching process, what they have in common and how their original traditions influence differentiation between them. We also wished to create an instrument that could be used for collecting reasonably reliable data about a coaching session and for measuring significant aspects of the session. After significant discussion and consideration of difficulties we decided to create an instrument that could be applicable

for two different purposes: objective analysis and understanding of viewpoints. The appropriate application of the same Q set would be assured by different instructions for each purpose.

We also decided that focusing on specific elements of the session, however crucial, are not sufficient. We wanted to create an instrument that represents the nature of the whole coaching session. This instrument should aim to understand the process of the session acknowledging the role of the coach, the client and the dyad of coach and client.

How was the instrument developed?

First of all we had to develop a comprehensive list of items describing the coaching process. We involved in this process as wide a circle of experienced coaching practitioners as possible to assure professional credibility of this Q set. We started from creating the list of items individually. Then we discussed our lists between the three of us in the research team until we arrived at the agreement on how all items are formulated. The main aim was for the items to differentiate between:

- styles / schools of coaching
- levels of coaching (beginner or experienced)
- **c**oaching and neighboring fields (e.g. counseling, consulting)

The next step was to involve focus groups and the wider coaching community. The focus groups were held in the UK, USA and Canada and consisted of experienced coaches who also had an expertise in research or training of coaches. The first focus group met to explore the fit between the Q set created by us and the description of the coaching process as they saw it. The group had an opportunity to use the presented Q set for evaluation of a video-recording of an actual coaching session. As a result of the whole day of activities and discussions this group was able to identify statements that needed to be modified, added or removed from the initial list. After this focus group, researchers discussed all received suggestions and made modifications to the Q set. This modified Q set formed a basis for a similar process with two other focus groups. The discussions of all three groups were audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

To involve a wider group of coaches in refining the instrument we created a dedicated website in which we invited coaches from all over the world to comment on the Q sort

that consisted at that time of 80 items describing a coaching session. 207 visitors from 26 countries visited the site 344 times and left 167 comments. We used this feedback to make further adjustments to the Q set.

What was our final Q set?

Both focus groups and the final stage of gathering wider feedback produced a significant amount of material that we analyzed using thematic analysis. Many themes have emerged that influenced significantly every decision about the final Q set. The analysis showed that it is possible to arrive at a set of items that is sufficiently comprehensive; focused on process rather than content and formulated in language acceptable for coaches from many different orientations.

The instructions for using the instrument were also developed as the result of this analysis (please, see Appendix A) for two sets of instructions developed. One set could be used if the instrument is applied for evaluating imagined typical session and the second set is designed for evaluation of actual observed session.

The following table 2 is our final list of items that we call CPQS (Coaching Process Q Set).

Item's Number	Items
1	There is an exploration of the effect of client's choice of words
2	There is an exploration of the client's values
3	There is an exploration of the client's environmental influences (e.g., organizational, family, politics, history)
4	There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset (e.g., assumptions, beliefs, stories)
5	Coach and client explore the deeper meaning of a presenting issue
6	Coach works with the client's apparent defensiveness
7	Coach points out recurrent theme in client's behavior
8	Coach points out potential unconscious motives of the client (out of the client's awareness)
9	There is an exploration of the client's in session non-verbal behavior
10	Coach invites client to consider other people's perspectives on an issue
11	Coach initiates exploration of client's resources and how they might be leveraged (including strengths, accomplishments, and/or external resources)
12	Coach explores client's emotions
13	Coach encourages client to feel more deeply within session
14	Coach encourages client to become more aware of his immediate experience in the session

15   Coach challenges client's perspective of situation and/or self
16   Coach asks client to quantify feeling / perception / issue using a scale
17   There is one or more periods of silent reflection
18   There is a discussion of the results of a psychometric instrument
19   There is a discussion of external feedback
20   Coach gives feedback from coach's experience of client
21   Coach discloses own feelings/ bodily sensations evoked in the session
22   There appears to be a productive use of metaphors
23   Coach and client explore their differences in perception of the situation
24   Coach expands on client's statements
25   Coach provides reassurance to client
26   Coach uses humor
27   Coach shows empathy
28   Coach shares personal details about herself
29   Coach discloses own fallibility
30   There appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach
31   Coach and client appear to understand each other
32   Coach and client discuss their relationship
33   Coach asks for permission to give feedback
34   Coach repeats client's words back to him
35   Coach paraphrases the client's statements
36   Coach checks if her understanding is correct
37   There is a sense of optimism in the coaching session
38   There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session
39   Coach and client appear to be engaged (vs. disengaged)
40   Coach follows up on key / significant statements made by client
41   Coach asks questions helping the client to elaborate
42   There is a discussion of the coaching "contract"
43   There is a discussion of issues related to the termination of coaching
44   There is a discussion of boundaries and/or ethical issues related to the coaching engagement
45   There is a discussion of a potential referal to an outside specialist (e.g., therapist, doctor, financial advisor)
46   The session is fast-paced
47   The session appears highly structured
48   Coach and client appear to bring the session to closure easily
49   Coach and client discuss the process of the session
50   Coach takes an active role during the session
51   Coach makes explicit a shift in role during the session (e.g., acting as consultant, teacher, therapist)
52   Coach explains the reason behind using a specific intervention
53   Coach appears to be using an intervention mechanistically
54   Coach appears to be pursuing her own agenda
55   Client takes initiative in structuring the session
56   There is a discussion of client's feedback on coaching
57   Coach makes sounds or non-verbally encourages client to continue

58   Coach is verbose
59   Coach interrupts client
60   Client interrupts coach
61   Coach suggests in-session exercise / activity
62   Coach broadens the focus of discussions
63   Coach asks questions that appear to open new possibilities for the client
64   Coach appears to focus on a third-party's agenda (e.g., organization, partner, parents)
65   Client suggests his next course of action
66   There is a discussion of new practices for the client
67   Coach offers possible solutions
68   Coach suggests homework for client
69   Coach shares her knowledge about topic
70   Coach gives advice
71   Coach follows up on previous homework
72   Coach encourages client to make choices
73   Coach asks the client to describe key learnings / take-aways from session
74   There is a discussion of the client's progress
75   There is a discussion about the client's overall goals
76   There is a discussion about how to measure the success of the coaching engagement
77   Coach redirects client to client's agenda
78   Coach explores client's level of engagement in coaching
79   Coach inquires about client's aim for the session
80   There is a discussion of the client's impact on his environment (e.g., organization, family)

Table 2   The Coaching Process Q Set (CPQS)

How we applied the developed instrument for comparing differences and similarities between the elements of coaching sessions conducted by coaches from various school/traditions?

From two choices of using the instrument we decided this time not to use it for observed actual sessions but to compare how practitioners who coach according to different schools/types/traditions describe their own typical imagined session using this instrument.   We believed that this study could contribute to the debates about a definition of coaching that is still an unresolved issue (Cox, et al, 2010; Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2009; Sherman & Reas, 2004; Kilburg, 1996, Ferrar, 2004). One of us actually argued in 2009 that it is impossible to find a suitable definition of coaching on the basis of the process because of the immeasurable variety of coaching schools, traditions, theories, models or practical considerations (Bachkirova and Kauffman,

2009). This research could show if this argument could be supported. However, if there are more similarities than differences in the process of coaching it could help us to make a step towards a definition of coaching on the basis of its process.

With this purpose we invited coaches to take part in this research by announcing this opportunity in many forums and newsletter of professional bodies. We asked them to use the instrument to describe one of their own typical mid engagement coaching session. 41 coaches from 5 countries agreed to participate. When asked about their primary school or tradition of coaching their answer varied from 'mixed' to more specific such as CTI, Gestalt, brain-based, existential, person-centered, and appreciative inquiry. They were directed through our website http://www.coaching-process.org to the website on www.q-assessor.com to complete an online q-sort using the final Q sort.

Participants were directed to place the items into 3 categories – characteristic, neutral, and uncharacteristic. Following this, they were directed to place each item into one of 11 categories using a fixed distribution with fewer items at the extremes and a greater number in the more central categories. Categories ranged in size from 2 items at each extreme to 14 items in the central category. This process is intended to encourage participants to make clear discriminations between items.

What did we find?

In order to understand the data as comprehensibly as possible, we applied Q-mode factor analysis and qualitative analysis of participants' feedback. Factor analysis allows to understand competing viewpoints on how the session is described and to identify groups of participants who see their session in a similar way (a full description of the methods of analysis is available directly from the authors).

The analysis revealed that only one significant factor could be determined suggesting one overall common perspective shared about how to describe a coaching session. As one might expect, there are some individual differences despite an apparently strong overall consensus. Coaches seemed to agree more strongly about items they consider uncharacteristic of coaching than about those items that they consider characteristic. In the Appendix B you can see most characteristic and least characteristic items representing this factor in the form of a factor array intended to illustrate the factor. The

fact that coaches could achieve consensus in terms of how to describe a typical coaching session suggests that there are common elements occurring in a coaching session that can be described in non theoretical terms.

Our next step was to interpret the factor array (patterns in this overall description of a typical coaching session). Each suggested pattern is presented next by a group of items showing the statement number in the Q set (e.g. Item 63) and a score (e.g. +4 or -3) that indicates how characteristic (+5 is the highest score) or uncharacteristic (-5 is the lowest score) that statement was in this overall description of a typical coaching session. We interpreted each pattern as a Gestalt which gives some ideas of how a typical coaching session look like from the shared point of view of the participated coaches.

Interpretation of Factor Array

The viewpoint expressed in the factor array is that coaching is about firmly being of service of the concerns of the client:

> *Item 54 Coach appears to be pursuing her own agenda -5 (ie., highly uncharacteristic)*
>
> *Item 64 Coach appears to focus on a third-party's agenda. -4*
>
> *Item 79: Coach inquires about client's aim for the session +4*
>
> *Item 75 There is a discussion about the client's overall goals +3*

Within this service context, the role of the coach is to ask questions and to work with the sense making processes and worldview of the client rather than from her own or others' frame of reference:

> *Item 41 Coach asks questions helping the client to elaborate +5*
>
> *Item 40 Coach follows up on key/significant statements made by the client +2*
>
> *Item 58 Coach is verbose -4 (i.e. there is a focus on letting the client talk)*
>
> *Item 2 There is an exploration of the client's values +3*
>
> *Item 70 Coach gives advice -4 (i.e. Does not give own worldview)*

The coaching session is considered to be fluid and absorbing but not fast paced:

Item 47 The session appears highly structured -4

Item 39 Coach and client appear to be engaged +3

Item 46 The session is fast-paced -3

Elements of the session which might disrupt "flow" (Czikszentmihalyi, 1991) tend to be minimized:

Item 53 Coach appears to be using an intervention mechanistically -5

Item 51 Coach makes explicit a shift in role during the session -2

Item 17 There is one or more periods of silent reflection +1

Item 52 Coach explains the reason behind using a specific intervention 0

A sense of hope and positivity is also evident in a typical session:

Item 63 Coach asks questions that appear to open new possibilities for the client +5

Item 37 There is a sense of optimism in the coaching session +3

High value is given to the importance of connection, warmth, understanding and respect:

Item 30 There appears to be rapport (strong connection) +4

Item 36: Coach checks if her understanding is correct +3

Item 27 Coach shows empathy +4

Item 59 Coach interrupts client -3

Item 60 Client interrupts coach -3

Item 31 Coach and client appear to understand each other +2

On the whole, what seems to be *the most characteristic* of a typical coaching session from the views expressed by the extended group of coaches could be summarized in the following way: A typical coaching session was perceived to be a client focused and fluid process in which the coach and client explore the worldview of the client in the context of an engaging and respectful relationship holding positive expectations.

It is also important to explore what types of events were *not considered characteristic* of a typical coaching session. This may be because these events, while clearly of significance in some coaching sessions, are not common in a typical coaching session (De Haan, 2010).

> *Item 45 There is discussion of a potential referral to an outside specialist (e.g., therapist, doctor, financial advisor) -3*
>
> *Item 43 There is a discussion of issues related to the termination of coaching -3*
>
> *Item 44 There is a discussion of boundaries and/or ethical issues related to the coaching engagement -2*
>
> *Item 78 Coach explores client's level of engagement in coaching -2*

There also seemed to be an aversion to considering coaching as a process of uncovering unconscious motivations or feelings as in some therapeutic contexts or particular traditions of coaching:

> *Item 8 Coach points out potential unconscious motives of the client (out of client's awareness) -2*
>
> *Item 6 Coach works with client's apparent defensiveness -2*
>
> *Item 13 Coach encourages client to feel more deeply within session -3*
>
> *Item 21 Coach discloses own feelings/bodily sensations evoked in the session -2*

Related to this is a possible aversion to the use of psychometric instruments, which also typically seek to classify or probe into the "psyche" of the client:

> *Item 18 There is a discussion of the results of a psychometric instrument -2*

Together items 8, 6, 13 and 18 (above) could be indicative of a view that coaching is not a process of stretching into the "inner psyche" of the client with privileged knowledge owned by the coach. However, this does not mean that meaning or behavioural patterns cannot be explored in a more conscious manner in which both have access to understanding of the issue:

> *Item 5 Coach and client explore the deeper meaning of a presenting issue +2*

> *Item 15 Coach challenges client's perspective of situation and/or self +2*

> *Item 7 Coach points out recurrent theme in client's behaviour +2*

The placing of some of the statements towards *the middle of the distribution* is also of interest. Many of these ratings can be understood in the context of some of the main themes already outlined. For example, if coaching is perceived as a process of focusing firmly on the needs of the client and doing this in a manner that shows respect and empathy, then it follows that activities that might highlight the client's accountability become relatively less important. Understanding the client and working to his own agenda appear to be more important than his speed of progress:

> *Item 72 Coach encourages client to make choices +1*

> *Item 74 There is discussion of the client's progress +1*

> *Item 77 Coach redirects client to client's agenda 0*

> *Item 71 Coach follows up on previous homework +2*

Some items occupying a mid-range position also seem to shift the focus from the issues of the client:

> *Item 3 There is an exploration of the client's environmental influences (e.g. organizational, family, politics, history) 0*

> *Item 80 There is a discussion of the client's impact on his environment (e.g. organization, family) 0*

> *Item 10 Coach invites client to consider other people's perspectives +1*

> *Item 19 There is a discussion of external feedback -1*

> *Item 20 Coach gives feedback from coach's experience of client +1*

> *Item 23 Coach and client explore their differences in perception of the situation 0*

> *Item 24 Coach expands on client's statements +1*

> *Item 29 Coach discloses own fallibility-1*

> *Item 33 Coach asks for permission to give feedback 0*

> *Item 50 Coach takes an active role in the session 0*

Item 62 Coach broadens the focus of discussions 0

Together these items tend to consider perspectives and issues beyond the centrality of the worldview of the client. Items which scored higher (and as already listed above) tended to be much more centred on the client, e.g.:

Item 41 Coach asks questions helping the client to elaborate +5 (i.e from the client's perspective)

Item 63 Coach asks questions that appear to open new possibilities for the client +5 (i.e. starting from the client's worldview)

Other mid-ranging scores tended to depersonalise/quantify the client in the same way that statements relating to the use of psychometric instruments or the exploration of unconscious process might also do (which were scored negatively):

Item 16 Coach asks client to quantify feeling/perception/ issue using a scale -1

This thematic exploration of the viewpoint of the extended group of coaches suggests a broadly humanistic orientation in which events relating to disruptions in the relationship would not be considered as typical. This viewpoint is not compatible with the coach assuming an authoritative or directive position. An equal rejection was expressed towards using methods or discussion topics that tended to depersonalize clients or draw them away from their personal orientation towards their own world.

What does this mean in relation to defining coaching?

Taking into consideration some limitations of the process of sorting and the size of the sample (please, see a comprehensive discussion of limitations in the full report) we believe that the result of the study may be indicative of a broad consensus across coaching practitioners about what *typically* happens in a *typical* coaching session in spite of significant differences in their theoretical orientations and traditions. Although we were expecting to find more differences than similarities between different groups of coaches who described their typical coaching session the findings of this study did not confirm this expectations.

This suggests the potential to create a 'good enough' definition of coaching. It appears that a typical coaching session is perceived to be a client-focused and fluid process in

which the coach and client explore the worldview of the client in the context of an engaging and respectful relationship holding positive expectations.

What are our conclusions?

We fulfilled the aim of this project to create an instrument that could be used for describing both an actual observed coaching session and an imagined typical session. At many stages of the process we received significant amount of qualitative feedback from various groups of participants. On the one hand this feedback suggested that CPQS is sufficiently comprehensive and allows coaches from various backgrounds, schools and orientations to describe and evaluate coaching process. On the other hand the analysis of their feedback allowed us to make many changes in the instrument in order to improve it.

At the same time we expect this instrument to evolve over time, as researchers use the instrument and identify missing items, redundant items, and items that might be clarified. We anticipate that, there could be future versions of this instrument, as additional use in the field can help to refine the list of items. It may also be useful, going forward, to create a manual that describes each item in greater detail, giving examples of how it might be interpreted when rated as "highly characteristic" or "highly uncharacteristic".

The application of the instrument for describing an imagined typical coaching session by 41 coaches demonstrated a strong consensus in the way coaching sessions are described. The fact that a random sample of coaches sorted the items in the same way indicates that a generic definition of coaching is possible. The study indicates an actual set of the elements of the session that could form a base of a definition of coaching.

The instrument may be used for potential research comparing coaching with other practices. When a similar instrument was used to create prototypes of different types of psychotherapy and these prototypes were compared to actual practice (using the same instrument), researchers found that the actual practices were more similar than the prototypes had suggested (Ablon & Jones, 1998; Ablon, Levy & Katzenstein, 2006). It will be interesting to see, in future research, how the group consensus of imagined sessions that we found compares to actual sessions, as described by the new instrument.

We hope that this instrument will help to answer many intriguing questions about coaching process and to generate many research projects. We are looking forward to hearing from anyone who wants to use this instrument for research, training or coaching supervision and will be happy to discuss with them different ways of using PCQS.

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Appendix A

Two sets of instructions for the two contexts in which the instrument might readily be used (an observed session and an imagined typical session)

Instructions for describing an observed session

This exercise requires allocating *every one* of 80 statements describing elements of a coaching session a ranking position within the fixed sorting distribution of 11 groups. You will be comparing each statement to other statements and will decide which statements seem more characteristic of the coaching session that you have observed, which statements seem uncharacteristic of this session and which statements are neither *characteristic* nor *uncharacteristic*.

Statements which would be chosen towards the "*highly characteristic"* end of the distribution would typically represent a particularly defining characteristic of this session – the statements might refer to things that occurred frequently during this session or seem characteristic of this session for other reasons.

Conversely, statements which will be placed towards the "*highly uncharacteristic*" pole will typically be those that are very unlike the session that you just have observed. They define what this session was *not like*.

Statements in the middle of the two poles are likely to be *neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic* of this session.

For example, if the statement 'Coach encourages client to make choices' is chosen as *highly characteristic,* it means that it describes this session more than other statements. If the same statement is chosen as *highly uncharacteristic,* it means that in this session the coach did not suggest the client to make choices and that you find this significant in describing this session.

As you work through the sorting process, you will initially be asked to sort statements into 3 categories (*characteristic* and *uncharacteristic* leaving a third group as neither *characteristic nor uncharacteristic*). You will then be asked to make further discriminations until all items have been sorted into the fixed numbers of statements for each position on the continuum.

Throughout this process you can change the position of the statements as often as necessary until you are satisfied that the final distribution of statements describes this session as accurately as possible.

If you have any problems completing the Q sort, please feel free to ask for clarification.

Thank you very much for participating in this research

Instruction for describing an imagined typical session

This exercise requires allocating *every one* of 80 statements describing elements of a coaching session a ranking position within the fixed sorting distribution of 11 groups. You will be comparing each statement to other statements and will decide which statements seem more characteristic of the coaching session you conducted recently, which statements seem uncharacteristic of the session and which statements are neither *characteristic* nor *uncharacteristic*.

Statements which would be chosen towards the "*highly characteristic"* end of the distribution would typically represent a particularly defining characteristic of your session – the statements might refer to things that occurred frequently during your session or seem characteristic of your session for other reasons.

Conversely, statements which will be placed towards the "*highly uncharacteristic*" pole will typically be those that are very unlike your session. They define what your session was *not like*.

Statements in the middle of the two poles are likely to be *neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic* of your session.

For example, if the statement 'Coach encourages client to make choices' is chosen as *highly characteristic,* it means that it describes your session more than other statements. If the same statement is chosen as *highly uncharacteristic,* it means that in your session it is unlikely that it would be your initiative in suggesting the client make choices and that you find this significant in describing your typical session.

As you work through the sorting process, you will initially be asked to sort statements into 3 categories (*characteristic* and *uncharacteristic* leaving a third group as neither *characteristic nor uncharacteristic*). You will then be asked to make further discriminations until all items have been sorted into the fixed numbers of statements for each position on the continuum.

Throughout this process you can change the position of the statements as often as necessary until you are satisfied that the final distribution of statements describes your typical session as accurately as possible.

If you have any problems completing the Q sort, please feel free to ask for clarification.

Thank you very much for participating in this research

Appendix B

20 most characteristic items

Rank	Statement number	Statement
1	63	Coach asks questions that appear to open new possibilities for the client
2	41	Coach asks questions helping the client to elaborate
3	79	Coach inquires about client's aim for the session
4	30	There appears to be rapport (strong connection) between client and coach
5	4	There is an exploration of the client's underlying mindset (e.g., assumptions, beliefs, stories)
6	27	Coach shows empathy
7	75	There is a discussion about the client's overall goals
8	36	Coach checks if her understanding is correct
9	2	There is an exploration of the client's values
10	39	Coach and client appear to be engaged (vs. disengaged)
11	37	There is a sense of optimism in the coaching session
12	11	Coach initiates exploration of client's resources and how they might be leveraged (including strengths, accomplishments, and/or external resources)
13	40	Coach follows up on key / significant statements made by client
14	15	Coach challenges client's perspective of situation and/or self
15	31	Coach and client appear to understand each other
16	7	Coach points out recurrent theme in client's behaviour
17	5	Coach and client explore the deeper meaning of a presenting issue
18	73	Coach asks the client to describe key learnings / take-aways from session
19	71	Coach follows up on previous homework
20	38	There appears to be a shift in energy during the coaching session

20 Most uncharacteristic items

Rank	Statement number	Statement
80	54	Coach appears to be pursuing her own agenda
79	53	Coach appears to be using an intervention mechanistically
78	58	Coach is verbose
77	64	Coach appears to focus on a third-party's agenda (e.g., organization, partner, parents)
76	47	The session appears highly structured
75	70	Coach gives advice
74	60	Client interrupts coach
73	59	Coach interrupts client
72	45	There is a discussion of a potential referal to an outside specialist (e.g., therapist, doctor, financial advisor)
71	46	The session is fast-paced
70	13	Coach encourages client to feel more deeply within session
69	43	There is a discussion of issues related to the termination of coaching
68	28	Coach shares personal details about herself
67	78	Coach explores client's level of engagement in coaching
66	21	Coach discloses own feelings/ bodily sensations evoked in the session
65	51	Coach makes explicit a shift in role during the session (e.g., acting as consultant, teacher, therapist)
64	6	Coach works with the client's apparent defensiveness
63	32	Coach and client discuss their relationship
62	8	Coach points out potential unconscious motives of the client (out of the client's awareness)
61	18	There is a discussion of the results of a psychometric instrument