EVALUATING COACHING BEHAVIOR IN MANAGERS, CONSULTANTS, AND COACHES: A MODEL, QUESTIONNAIRE, AND INITIAL FINDINGS

Erik de Haan and Viktor O. Nilsson
Ashridge Business School

This is a study of coaching behaviors both as reported by executive coaches, consultants, and managers and by the coaches' clients. We present a conceptual model of coaching behaviors that is comprehensive, intuitive, and easily quantifiable. We then introduce a questionnaire, based on the model, that has been in use for several decades. The latest version of this Coaching Behaviors Questionnaire can help researchers generate evidence about perceived behaviors in the coaching relationship. In fact, we report on an initial large-scale study of coaching behaviors using the questionnaire among 537 coaches, 196 consultants, and 559 manager-coaches as well as 221 clients of coaching. The study demonstrates significant differences in perceived behavior by subjects who differ in age, gender, and nationality. Significant differences are also found for those that identify themselves as "managers" versus "consultants" versus "coaches" and for those looking at the behaviors from the other side of the relationship, the clients of coaching. Some of the differences can be attributed to the fact that more experienced coaches will perceive themselves to develop different coaching behaviors. It is shown how an instrument such as this could be used to have observers rate coaching behaviors and even, ultimately, assess the skills of those practicing such coaching behaviors.

Keywords: executive coaching, coaching behaviors, leadership development, client–coach relationship, circumplex model

As an executive coach, you have a wide array of behavioral responses at your disposal at any moment in a coaching engagement. The sheer amount of possibilities can be dizzying and a real source of doubt and anxiety (de Haan, 2008). As you mature and professionalize, you will continue to spend time reflecting on which of these "interventions" to use and when. Likewise, your coaching client wonders what to say, when to say it, and how to invite you as the coach in with your responses. At the same time, you and your client are forming views of each other's behaviors, and you are making inferences about what those behaviors tell you and how to respond.

In the coaching literature, there has been a lot of discussion and a proliferation of models of what we would call "the coach's best behaviors" (i.e., which interventions to use and when). Thus far, most of this debate has been without much evidential support (i.e., without much knowledge of

Erik de Haan and Viktor O. Nilsson, Ashridge Centre for Coaching, Ashridge Business School.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Erik de Haan, Ashridge Business School, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 1NS United Kingdom. E-mail: erik.dehaan@ashridge.org.uk

which behaviors coaches think they use and which behaviors clients think they receive—and vice versa). Measurements of coach behaviors or coaches' and clients' own views on coaching behaviors have been rare (for some exceptions, see Ianiro, Schermuly, & Kauffeld, 2013, and de Haan, Culpin, & Curd, 2011).

To start investigating coaching skills, one needs a basic model of such interventions that is general and broad enough, not too detailed and complicated, and with a limited number of classes of interventions so that reliable measurements can be made. The model should also have high validity: Clients and coaches need to be able to recognize each of the classes of intervention from a short description, and their ratings should conform to their intuitive appreciation of the interventions.

Even when this is achieved, residual problems remain because of "equivocal communication" (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990): the fact that we rarely communicate unequivocally and simply and that we are rarely (if at all) completely congruent between our main utterance (the content of what we say) and our behavior (how we say it). All communication is nuanced and subtitled by overtones of nonverbal support, contrast, or embellishment and by double meaning, irony, idiosyncratic choices among synonyms, and the use of metaphor. All communication is partly self-referential. Therefore, any "coach intervention" is accompanied by (in fact, intertwined with) a "meta-communication" that may announce, amplify, contradict, call into question, or in many other ways modify the primary communication (e.g., think of the "ulterior transactions" in transactional analysis; Lapworth & Sills, 2011).

Therefore, as a first step toward gathering evidence on real-life coaching interventions, it is important to abstract somewhat from the richness and subtlety of all human communication. Here we offer a simple model of coaching interventions that is based on Heron's influential work on counseling interventions; an operationalization of the model in a short questionnaire with an analysis of its statistical properties; and a report on the first large-scale study with the same questionnaire, including methodology, results, and discussion subsections.

The Coaching Behaviors Model

In this research, we have taken a model with only six categories of coaching intervention (Heron, 1975), of which the first two (Prescribing and Informing) are not encouraged in some models of executive coaching because they are essentially telling others what to do or giving them information. However, we believe it would not help to restrain coaching behaviors a priori. It would be best to start with a model that covers the widest range of coaching interventions in a simple and intuitive way. Moreover, these more directive interventions may have a role to play in effective coaching with the right timing and context. They may be more typical of manager-coaches who combine coaching with giving instructions (as we will suggest in Hypothesis 1). The model was proposed by John Heron (1975; see Figure 1) and looks at coaching skills and behaviors in a broad sense, through six classes of interventions that a coach may use:

1. *Prescribing:* giving directions, advice, and recommendations to the learner/client. The coach directs the learning experience in some way, taking a degree of responsibility for coaching goals, learning methods, the design and possible solutions within the coaching experience, and the process of learning review and assessment.

2. *Informing:* giving information and knowledge to the learner/client. The coach gives information to the learner; this could be technical, professional, business, or organizational knowledge. It could also be "feedback" about the content of coaching or about the potential consequences of different courses of action. The coach might offer this spontaneously or might be asked for it by the learner.

3. *Confronting:* challenging the learner/client's assumptions; stimulating their awareness of their own behavior, attitudes, or beliefs. The coach uses confrontation to help the learner to gain a deeper awareness of something that appears (to the coach) important to his or her learning.
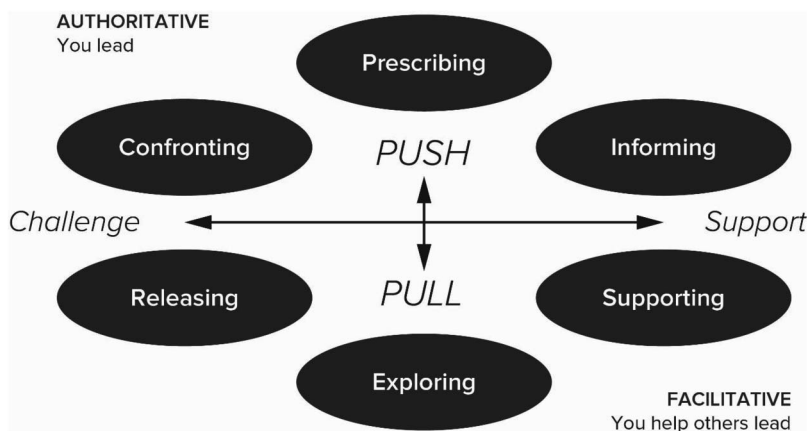
Figure 1. The "Heron model" of counseling and coaching behaviors (after Heron, 1975), stretching from highly directive to highly facilitative interventions and from challenging to supporting options.

4. *Releasing (or, in Heron's own terms, "cathartic" interventions):* helping the learner/client to release tension and to discharge or come to terms with emotions that are blocking progress. The coach helps the learner to express and to deal with emotions that are holding him or her back in the learning activity.

5. *Exploring (or, in Heron's own terms, "catalytic" interventions):* helping the learner/client to self-discovery, to self-directed learning, and to owning and solving his or her own problems without becoming involved in the learning or changing oneself as a coach. Skills used within this category are active listening, summarizing, paraphrasing, echoing, and inquiring more deeply through open, client-led questioning.

6. *Supporting:* building the learner/client's self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect. Self-esteem is strengthened by welcoming and offering specific support, appreciation, and praise; expressing confidence or agreement; or by appropriate self-disclosure and sharing.

We used Heron's summaries of relevant behavioral categories to design a circumplex model with six dimensions, which compose three pairs of opposing dimensions that can be mapped on two orthogonal axes. These axes reflect choices that have long been recognized to be important in helping conversations (de Haan & Burger, 2005): directive versus nondirective interventions (push vs. pull) and challenging versus supporting interventions (addressing weaknesses vs. supporting strengths). The circumplex structure suggests that coaching behaviors are distributed in a two-dimensional circular space, spanned by dominance (push vs. pull) and appreciation (pessimism vs. optimism) dimensions, a bit like Timothy Leary's circumplex model of interaction, which is spanned by dominance and affiliation (Leary, 1957). Dominance represents the vertical axis and appreciation represents the horizontal axis whereas the center of the circle represents a neutral level of both and thus ultimately a vanishing of the coaching relationship. The model implies that the best coaches are those whose repertoires can flexibly and nimbly use the full range of behavioral presence at the right time.

The Coaching Behaviors Questionnaire and Its Statistical Properties

We have operationalized these six categories of coaching interventions by developing the Coaching Behaviors Questionnaire (CBQ)[1] with 18 forced-choice questions, each having four answering

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[1] The first version of the questionnaire was created and used by Richard Phillips in 1994, and subsequent versions were developed with help from Alex Davda, Helen Lockett, and Judy Curd at Ashridge.

categories (the user needs to distribute exactly 10 points over the four categories in such a way that they correspond as much as possible with how they coach—or, in the feedback questionnaire, how they perceive their coach/consultant/manager is coaching them). We chose this ipsative, forced-choice design so that the questionnaire is congruent with questions coaches face in their practice, again and again having to choose among a limited set of appropriate behaviors. Moreover, the ipsative nature of the questionnaire reduces response biases and forces the user to choose behavioral categories over others; therefore, it generates more distinctive profiles. There are 72 items in total; thus, for each one of the six categories of intervention there are 12 item loadings (see the Appendix and, for earlier, nonipsative versions of the questionnaire, see de Haan & Burger, 2005, and subsequent editions).

We have tested empirical support for the questionnaire and underpinning model with the help of factor analyses, validity, and reliability measurements. The basic statistical properties of the CBQ are given in Table 1.

First, analysis based on the correlations between the scales for the $N = 1,292$ norm group yields three clusters:

1. There is a cluster around Prescribing, Informing, and Supporting, which all correlate positively with each other, particularly Prescribing and Informing (with $r = .66$), whereas the two correlations with Supporting are considerably lower ($r = .15$ and $r = .04$).
2. Confronting correlates negatively with all of the other scales, and in particular with Supporting ($r = -.38$).
3. There is a third cluster around Exploring and Releasing, which correlate with $r = .46$.

Second, factor analysis confirms that 34% of variance was covered by the first three factors, which stand out from the other factors that explain much less than 3% of the variance each (eigenvalues of the first six factors are 17.05, 4.39, 3.7, 2.59, 2.18, and 1.83). The strongest three factors confirm the conclusions from the correlations table:

1. Factor 1 has strong loading from Prescribing and Informing, negative loading from Exploring and Releasing, and some positive loading from Supporting. The 10 items with strongest factor loading for factor 1 consisted of 8 positively correlated items from Prescribing and 1 from Informing. One additional negative item from Exploring completed the top-10 strongest factor loadings.
2. Factor 2 has considerable loading from Confronting and considerable negative loading from Supporting. The 10 strongest factor loadings for factor 2 consisted of five positive correlated items of Confronting, four negative items from Supporting, and one additional negative item from Exploring.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Reliability Estimates, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

| | | | | | | | | | r | | |
Variable	Items	N	M	SD	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Prescribing	12	1,297	16.70	11.43	0–55	*.91*					
2. Informing	12	1,297	24.37	8.24	0–52	.65***	.66				
3. Confronting	12	1,297	31.75	7.44	2–63	−.13***	−.13***	*.61*			
4. Releasing	12	1,297	31.48	12.05	0–80	−.75***	−.71***	−.04	*.85*		
5. Exploring	12	1,297	43.24	11.16	13–102	−.73***	−.59***	−.12**	.46***	*.81*	
6. Supporting	12	1,297	32.42	8.09	4–65	.15***	.04	−.38***	−.30***	−.32***	.66

Note. Cronbach αs of every multi-item variable are on the diagonal in the intercorrelations section of the table.
** $p < .01$.   *** $p < .001$.

3. Factor 3 has most loading from Releasing and some positive loading from Supporting but negative loading from Exploring. The 10 strongest factor loadings for factor three consisted of four positive items from Releasing and six negative items from Exploring.

Third, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of our circumplex model for the $N = 1,292$ norm group to see if the six dimensions can be arranged in an essentially circular structure. We have used the RANDALL program (Gurtman & Pincus, 2003), which yielded a near-significant correspondence index of .6528 ($p = .067$). It seems that the underlying concepts probably would fit a circular arrangement, but the current indicators are not quite a tightly reliable set of items. We think that the relatively low Cronbach's α values may be to blame because the lack of internal consistency may have generated too much scatter to make it a good fit.

Fourth, we have found the following degrees of reliability and validity:

- *Internal reliability:* Cronbach αs are an average of 0.75, a modest result that is partly because of the ipsative design of the questionnaire and partly because some of the behaviors consist of various items. Examples are the presence of both positive and negative challenges in Confronting and both compliments and the offering of availability in Supporting.
- *Construct validity:* Many of the managers and coaches we have talked to about (precursors of) this questionnaire found that it helped them to reflect on their own interventions as coaches. They tend to recognize the dimensions on which they are scored by the CBQ. Moreover, the model in Heron's (1975) book seems intuitive and comprehensive and has been corroborated by other writers about coaching interventions (such as Clutterbuck, 1985, and de Haan & Burger, 2005; both of the cited works introduce a similar 2 × 2 matrix with main dimensions being directive vs. facilitative and challenge vs. support).
- *Face validity:* Although many schools of coaching (and psychotherapy) emphasize highly specific interventions such as "miracle questions" (Berg & Szabo, 2005) or "clean language" (Tosey, Lawley, & Meese, 2014), there is little evidence for their particular effectiveness. Heron's (1975) underlying model seems to contain the kind of generic interventions ("common factors") that are increasingly being researched in coaching (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013). Users and experts have confirmed that the questions seem to be relevant and appropriate for the dimensions that they try to measure. In fact, in earlier versions we have weeded out items that seemed less relevant to practicing coaches or that did not correlate well with the others in the same category of coaching behavior.
- *Content validity:* Because the questionnaire was constructed on the basis of a clear and generally accepted theoretical model, we were able to conduct experiments to demonstrate the ability of this questionnaire to measure the dimensions that it purports to measure. In the largest of these experiments, we conducted a self-evaluation technique to explore content validity. We asked a group of 89 coaches and consultants to first take the CBQ and then, after an interval of at least 4 days, to self-score themselves on the six dimensions based on a classroom explanation. For this purpose, the 89 participants were talked through Figure 1, a 10-min explanation of the six dimensions. They were then asked to score themselves on these dimensions by dividing 180 points on the six scales in such a way that would describe themselves best as coaches. The scores were then correlated with their CBQ scores on the questionnaire as produced earlier and that they were given afterward. The correlation coefficient turned out to be $r = .55$ ($p < .005$), which is very high, at least with this group of 89.

Study of Coaching Behaviors Reported by Coaches and Clients

Introduction: Review of Previous Research

Although many authors have reviewed coaching behaviors and proposed lists or models of ranges of coaching behaviors, there is very little operationalization or empirical research of such interventions. The questionnaires that are reviewed here have only two or three coaching dimensions. We believe that there is still a major gap in the literature in terms of measuring coaching behavior and relating specific, measurable behaviors to measurable coaching outcomes. Here is a brief overview

of predecessors to this study, some of which were undertaken with executive coaches and some with trainees or line managers who had been developed to enhance their coaching skills.

One of the first to measure coaching behaviors was Hein (1990), who used a "survey of coaching activity" listing six specific coaching behaviors (providing positive feedback, providing negative feedback, providing direction in the coaching conversation, emphasizing facts or concepts, adhering to schedules, and identifying employee development needs); the survey was taken by managers and direct reports from 90 middle-management relationships in a U.S. national high-tech corporation. He found that the managers' Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality preferences for Extraversion and Intuition correlated significantly with giving more positive feedback. In addition, managers with Judgment preferences placed more emphasis on tight scheduling, and those with preferences for Intuition and Thinking spent more time on identifying development needs. Higher scores on the Extraversion and Intuition dimensions were associated with higher scores (from both managers themselves and their subordinates) for coaching effectiveness. Finally, just like in the later study by de Haan, Culpin, and Curd (2011), Hein found significant relationships between all of the coaching behaviors and coaching effectiveness. However, this could be mostly a result of same-source bias.

David Noer (2005) developed a "triangular" coaching-behaviors inventory measuring Supporting (including attending, inquiring, reflecting, and affirming behavioral components), Challenging (including confronting, focusing/shaping, reframing, and empowering/energizing behavioral components), and Assessing (including data-gathering, gap analysis, goal-setting, and measurement/feedback behavioral components), each with 10 items. This coaching-behaviors inventory was later used to explore national differences in self-reported coaching styles with a sample consisting of 71 U.S. and 80 Saudi managers from the same petrochemical corporation (Noer, Leupold, & Valle, 2007). Results indicated that Saudi managers scored significantly higher on Supporting ($d = 0.57$, $p < .01$) and Challenging ($d = 0.35$, $p < .05$) dimensions. Moreover, U.S. managers exhibited significantly more variance in their responses on both of those scales; therefore, they appeared to be a more heterogenous group regarding these behaviors. One interesting finding was that self-reported differences in style were not always confirmed on observation of video-taped sessions (Noer, 2005, with regards to Supporting behaviors).

Newsom and Dent (2011) developed an instrument consisting of 152 items of "work behavior of executive coaches" that was taken by 130 senior coaches working for a single global consultancy organization. Factor analysis yielded three main clusters: generic professional coach activities, conversational goal-setting and attainment activities, and more intimate relationship activities. They then showed that female coaches self-scored significantly higher on both goal-setting and attainment and on relationship behaviors ($d = 0.4$, $p < .05$), and more experienced coaches scored themselves significantly higher on goal-setting and attainment behaviors ($d = 0.49$, $p < .05$).

Chen, Ai, and You (2014) reconstructed Noer's triangular coaching-behaviors inventory for Chinese managers with 11, 15, and 20 items on the Assessing, Challenging, and Supporting scales, showing Cronbach αs of approximately 0.9. They looked at self-reported coaching behaviors for a group of 145 Chinese managers from three different sectors, demonstrating that

- Women have a significantly higher score than men on the Supporting ($p < .05$) dimension and no difference on other dimensions.
- More senior managers self-report significantly more Challenging ($p < .01$) and Supporting ($p < .05$) behaviors.
- Hospital managers report significantly more Challenging ($p < .01$) and Supporting ($p < .01$) behaviors.
- Challenging and Supporting scores also correlate with age, with older managers reporting significantly more Challenging ($p < .01$) and Supporting ($p < .05$) behaviors.
- Assessing ($p < .05$) and Challenging ($p < .01$) coaching-behavior scores also correlate positively with pleasure in their Orientation to Happiness scale (the scale consists of pleasure, meaning, and engagement).

The effect sizes are all small to medium size: d between 0.18 and 0.55.

De Haan, Culpin, and Curd (2011) examined how various executive-coaching interventions make a difference to clients. Seventy-one coaching clients, all senior managers from nearly as many organizations, reported on the various interventions of their accredited external coaches with a predecessor of the CBQ, and these ratings were compared with their evaluations. De Haan, Culpin, and Curd (2011) found a strong relationship between perceived coaching behaviors and client-reported effectiveness ($d = 1.1$ for the combined model, $p < .001$) but no distinction among specific coach interventions. Similar to Hein (1990), clients did not appear to prioritize any one category of behavior above others, except for some individual items such as "Playing the devil's advocate" and "Converting objections into opportunities," in which no significant link with effectiveness was found. Same-source bias was likely to play a role here. Nonetheless, in the eyes of clients, the helpfulness of their coach is experienced almost indiscriminately across all coaching behaviors, corroborating the suggestion that factors common to all coaching, such as the relationship, empathic understanding, and positive expectations, are important for effectiveness (de Haan, 2008).

Ianiro and colleagues (2013) analyzed executive-coaching outcomes on the basis of genuine interaction data from videotaping 33 initial coaching sessions with trainee psychologists as coaches and young professionals as clients, in terms of both the client's and the coach's interpersonal behavior, over two basic dimensions: Affiliation and Dominance (the well-known Leary, 1957, model). Findings suggest that both (a) the coach's Dominance behavior and (b) similarity of Dominance and Affiliation behavior between coach and client predict positive client ratings of goal-attainment after five more sessions; (b) also predicts positive client ratings of the relationship quality after five sessions. Likewise, Will, Gessnitzer, and Kauffeld (2016) analyzed videotapes of 19 one-off sessions in terms of coaches' empathetic behavior as perceived by both clients and coaches. They found that coaches' and clients' ratings of empathy did not correlate and that paraphrasing behaviors of coaches were indeed correlated with clients' perceived empathy and were significantly followed by affirmative client responses.

Hypotheses

In this pilot study, we used our circumplex CBQ to assess if (a) managers reflecting on their leadership coaching, (b) consultants reflecting on their one-to-one interventions, and (c) executive coaches reflecting on their coaching interventions have significantly different profiles on the six categories of intervention. We also wondered if the executive coaches and their clients (the clients provided measurements through a feedback questionnaire) would significantly agree or disagree on the use of these interventions.

Similar to Newsom and Dent (2011) and Chen and colleagues (2014), we expected significant differences among men and women, job description, and age:

Hypothesis 1: Response patterns between men and women are different, with women reporting less directive and more nondirective behaviors such as Releasing, Exploring, and Supporting.

Hypothesis 2: Response patterns are significantly different with job description, with specialized coaches scoring more typical coaching behaviors such as Releasing and Supporting than consultants and managers and fewer telling behaviors such as Prescribing and Informing.

Hypothesis 3: Response patterns are significantly different with age: Older managers, consultants, and coaches score more typical coaching behaviors such as Releasing and Supporting and fewer telling behaviors such as Prescribing and Informing.

Following Noer and colleagues (2007), we expected differences between national cultures, particularly around supportive and challenging interventions:

Hypothesis 4: Response patterns among coaches, consultants, and managers are significantly different with variations of country of origin; for example, in the area of Supporting and Confronting, we are expecting Anglo-Saxon cultures to self-score significantly lower.

Following what Will and colleagues (2016) found in the perception of empathetic behavior and what Noer (2005) described between manager-coaches and external observers, we expected self-scored coaching profiles to differ from client profiles, with clients possibly seeing fewer warm and nondirective coaching behaviors than their coaches do in their self-evaluations.

Hypothesis 5: Response patterns are significantly different between coaches, consultants, and managers on the one hand and their clients on the other, with clients seeing more Prescribing, Informing, and Confronting and less Releasing, Supporting, and Exploring.

Method

Participants

Coaches, consultants, managers, and clients participated in this survey-based study; they were invited because they formed part of the authors' wider network of executive and workplace coaches or because they completed the questionnaire in preparation for their professional, executive-coaching, higher-education masters of science program (or a part thereof) at Ashridge or an affiliated higher-education institution. Client profiles were collected through coaches requesting from our psychometrics department a feedback profile while submitting their client e-mail addresses. Coaches were mostly external coaches; they had an average age just less than 50 years and all had received some training, and some had qualified. Their clients were mostly middle managers in large organizations, both private and public sector; 61% were female and 39% were male. Response rates of coaches and clients were near 100% because of either the direct relationship involved or the need to complete the forms for the qualification program. It was an opportunistic sample of senior professionals, not a random sample. Data collection took place between December 2013 and March 2017. In that period, a total of 1,302 participants completed the survey. However, demographic information was only available on 1,292 of participants, which excludes the remaining participants from demographic comparisons. The distributions consisted of 559 professional coaches, 196 consultants, and 537 managers. Gender distribution consisted of 755 females and 537 males. The mean age belonged to the age group of 41 to 50 years ($SD = 1.34$ on a 9-point scale). The sample consisted of 54 different nationalities, and the largest samples were from the Netherlands ($n = 475$), the United Kingdom ($n = 348$), and Belgium ($n = 132$). Two hundred thirty-four coaching clients also participated in this research, with 13 incompletes, which rendered 221 complete client questionnaires.

Materials

The survey consisted of the CBQ; see the Appendix. Demographic information of job role, age, gender, and nationality was gathered from the survey, and the questionnaire was only available in English.

The wording of the CBQ was modified for the client participants: All instructions were worded, "When working with me, this person tends to do the following" and "this person" referred to the client's coach, consultant, or manager.

Results

We summarize the results of the coaching-behaviors-profiles analyses in Tables 2 and 3 and the results of the client-profiles analysis in Table 4. The coach/consultant/manager profiles were analyzed with the help of an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) test (see Table 2), a test that compares different populations (on gender, age, job description, and country of origin) on one of these four dimensions while controlling for the other three, so that we can be certain that any significant patterns found were not due to variations in the other dimensions or sample bias. The

Table 2

Analysis of Covariance Among the Independent Variables Gender, Job Description, Age, and Nationality While Controlling for the Effects of the Other Independent Variables (ANCOVA Tests)

| Variable | Gender | | f | d | Mean differences |
	Male	Female			Male – female
PR	19.85 (0.44)	15.51 (0.38)	54.74***	0.42	4.34***
IN	25.99 (0.33)	23.93 (0.28)	22.38***	0.29	2.06***
CO	31.94 (0.31)	32.93 (0.26)	0.00	0.00	0.004
RL	28.86 (0.47)	32.36 (0.40)	31.78***	0.35	−3.50***
EX	41.06 (0.45)	43.79 (0.39)	20.50***	0.29	−2.73***
SU	32.30 (0.34)	32.47 (0.29)	0.15	0.00	−0.18

| | Job description | | | f | d | Managers – coaches | Managers – consultants | Coaches – consultants |
	Manager	Coach	Consultant					
PR	20.79 (0.45)	12.96 (0.50)	17.73 (0.71)	57.65***	0.62	7.83***	3.06**	−4.77***
IN	26.66 (0.34)	21.93 (0.38)	26.22 (0.52)	42.25***	0.55	4.73***	0.43	−4.30***
CO	31.79 (0.32)	31.82 (0.35)	32.63 (0.49)	1.21	0.09	−0.03	−0.85	−0.82
RL	27.14 (0.48)	36.05 (0.53)	29.35 (0.75)	68.72***	0.67	−8.91***	−2.21*	6.70***
EX	39.27 (0.47)	46.77 (0.52)	42.42 (0.73)	49.83***	0.59	−7.50***	−3.15**	4.35***
SU	34.35 (0.35)	30.48 (0.39)	31.64 (0.55)	24.85***	0.41	3.88***	2.71***	−1.16

| | Age | | | f | d | Young – middle | Young – old | Middle – old |
	Young (<41 years)	Middle (41–50 years)	Old (>50 years)					
PR	20.35 (0.53)	16.40 (0.46)	15.71 (0.51)	22.89***	0.41	3.95***	4.64***	0.69
IN	26.11 (0.39)	23.93 (0.34)	24.65 (0.38)	8.97***	0.29	2.18***	1.46*	−0.72
CO	31.13 (0.37)	32.54 (0.32)	31.94 (0.35)	4.21*	0.20	−1.40*	−0.81	0.59
RL	27.62 (0.56)	31.93 (0.48)	32.63 (0.54)	24.09***	0.40	−4.32***	−5.01***	−0.70
EX	40.67 (0.54)	43.61 (0.47)	43.29 (0.52)	9.38***	0.29	−2.94***	−2.62**	0.32
SU	34.12 (0.41)	31.59 (0.35)	31.78 (0.40)	12.49***	0.30	2.53***	2.34***	−0.19

| | Nationality | | | f | d | BE – UK | BE – NL | UK – NL |
	BE	UK	NL					
PR	15.18 (0.85)	16.11 (0.59)	16.05 (0.46)	0.62	0.06	−0.93	−0.87	0.06
IN	22.97 (0.67)	24.51 (0.47)	23.44 (0.36)	2.11	0.15	−1.55	−0.47	1.07
CO	36.38 (0.63)	29.19 (0.43)	34.25 (0.34)	53.26***	0.70	7.19***	2.13**	−5.06***
RL	30.05 (0.92)	32.07 (0.64)	32.50 (0.40)	2.8	0.16	−2.02	−2.45*	−0.43
EX	42.70 (0.90)	45.49 (0.62)	42.18 (0.51)	7.92***	0.28	−2.79*	0.52	3.31***
SU	32.72 (0.69)	32.63 (0.47)	31.59 (0.37)	1.90	0.13	0.09	1.14	1.04

Note. Standard errors are presented within parentheses. BE = Belgium; UK = United Kingdom; NL = the Netherlands; PR = Prescribing; IN = Informing; CO = Confronting; RL = Releasing; EX = Exploring; SU = Supporting.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

client profiles were analyzed with the help of a paired *t*-test to pick up systematic differences between coach and client response profiles (see Table 4).

Hypothesis 1: Coaching Profiles Differ by Gender

There was a significant main effect of gender on four of the six dimensions, with the self-reported coaching interventions covered by Prescribing and Informing significantly higher for men than for

Table 3
An Independent t-*test Comparing the Rating of Nationalities on the Six Categories of Intervention by Participants from the Middle East and North America*

Variable	Middle East	North America	p
PR	12.84 (10.91)	26.74 (16.33)	.000
IN	23.56 (7.91)	29.44 (9.66)	.001
CO	28.59 (7.57)	28.00 (7.07)	.698
RL	36.72 (12.10)	23.03 (15.41)	.000
EX	48.16 (16.62)	37.90 (12.54)	.001
SU	30.44 (9.95)	34.90 (9.20)	.028

Note. Standard deviations are presented within parentheses. PR = Prescribing; IN = Informing; CO = Confronting; RL = Releasing; EX = Exploring; SU = Supporting.

women, whereas those covered by Exploring and Releasing were significantly higher for women, with effect sizes, *d*, between 0.38 and 0.53 (medium-sized effects), $p < .001$ (see Table 2). There were no significant differences for the remaining two classes of interventions. This confirms Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2: Coaching Profiles Differ by Job Description

Hypothesis 2 was also confirmed, with a significant main effect of profession. When considered in the order manager to consultant to coach, the self-reported coaching interventions covered by Prescribing, Informing, and Supporting all go significantly down whereas those covered by Exploring and Releasing go up, with effect sizes, *d*, between 0.41 and 0.67 (medium-sized effects), $p < .001$ (see Table 2). This effect is significant both between managers and consultants and between consultants and coaches.

Hypothesis 3: Coaching Profiles Differ by Age

Hypothesis 3 was also confirmed. There was a significant main effect of age on all six groups of interventions, with the self-reported coaching interventions covered by Prescribing, Informing, and Supporting all decreasing whereas those covered by Confronting, Exploring, and Releasing increased, with effect sizes, *d*, between 0.20 and 0.41 (small- to medium-sized effects), $p < .01$ (see Table 2), particularly if those younger than 40 years are compared with those older than 40 years. Note that although the same trend continues, there were no significant differences between those in their 40s and those older than 50 years; therefore, there is a tailing off of differences with age.

Hypothesis 4: Coaching Profiles Differ by Country of Origin

There were only two significant effects relating to country of origin of the coach/consultant/manager, partially supporting Hypothesis 4. We first took the three largest countries in the sample: the Netherlands ($n = 475$), United Kingdom ($n = 348$), and Belgium ($n = 132$). Results are in Table 2 and can be briefly summarized as follows: Self-scored coaching behaviors from Belgium and the Netherlands are higher on Confronting and lower on Exploring behavior than those from the United Kingdom (with the former effect size $d = 0.70$, a medium-sized effect, and the latter $d = 0.28$, a small effect, $p < .001$). This result gives us confidence that over time more national differences can be demonstrated with this questionnaire.

We have also checked the conclusions on national differences from the Noer et al. (2007) article. Although data sets from North America (United States plus Canada, $n = 39$) and from the Middle East (14 different Middle Eastern countries, $n = 64$) were small, we still found significant results but independent ones from those found by Noer et al. (2007). The independent *t*-test in Table 3

Table 4

A Paired t-*test Comparing the Rating of Coaches on the Six Categories of Intervention, by Coaches and by One (Randomly Chosen) Client, and Correlations (*R*) Between Coach and Client Ratings*

Variable	Coaches	Clients	p	R (coach – client ratings)
PR	8.38 (7.34)	15.14 (10.08)	.000	.37***
IN	18.71 (7.48)	23.48 (8.04)	.000	.28***
CO	31.29 (8.54)	30.95 (8.90)	.775	.18
RL	38.59 (9.83)	32.03 (11.11)	.000	.37***
EX	50.32 (12.21)	47.55 (12.04)	.068	.31***
SU	32.70 (8.40)	30.85 (7.26)	.092	.13

Note. Standard deviations are presented within parentheses. PR = Prescribing; IN = Informing; CO = Confronting; RL = Releasing; EX = Exploring; SU = Supporting.
*** $p < .001$.

shows differences between the participants from the Middle East and North America. Self-reported Prescribing and Informing were higher in North American coaches, whereas self-reported Releasing and Exploring were higher in Middle Eastern coaches (with effect sizes, *d*, between 0.67 and 1.0, i.e., large effects, $p < .001$). On the other hand, there were only small and contrarily significant differences in Confronting and Supporting, as would have been expected on the basis of the Noer et al. (2007) results. However, similar to those results, the variance in our North American sample was higher than in the Middle Eastern sample, although only significantly so for the Prescribing dimension (Levene's test, $p < .01$). Any differences may be due to sample biases. The data set for Noer et al. (2007) consisted entirely of manager-coaches, whereas our Middle Eastern data set is dominated by professional coaches and has proportionally more female and older coaches than the North American data set. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that both regions' average scores widely differ from the European averages in Table 2, confirming that substantial national differences are to be expected around the world.

Hypothesis 5: Coaching Profiles Differ by Viewpoint (Client vs. Coach)

Finally, we tested for differences within the client–coach relationship (i.e., between clients and coaches commenting on a common experience with coaching behaviors). Ninety-one of the coaches had at least one client reporting on their behavior with the feedback version of the questionnaire. For each coach, we randomly selected one client to avoid nested data (i.e., to avoid design bias). We first checked for correlations, which were positive on all dimensions, and four of six significantly so (see Table 4), indicating some level of agreement between clients and coaches. At the same time, a paired *t*-test shows systematic biases in matches of each of these coaches with one of their clients. Client scores turned out to be significantly different compared with the coach self-reports (see Table 4) on three of the six coaching behaviors, which confirmed Hypothesis 5.

The feedback group scored the coaches significantly higher for Prescribing and Informing interventions and significantly lower for Releasing interventions, with effect sizes, *d*, between 0.61 and 0.77 (medium-sized effects), $p < .001$ (see Table 4). These are surprisingly large effects for the relatively small sample. The same results with similar effect sizes are found when the 531 coaches' profiles are compared in an independent *t*-test with 150 coaches' client profiles. It is interesting to note that when the client profiles are compared with manager and consultant self-scores, the differences become much less significant (compare Tables 2 and 4), which brings the conclusion near that managers and consultants are in fact more realistic in their appreciation of their coaching behaviors (i.e., more in agreement with their clients' perceptions) than professional coaches. We

then did another *t*-test to compare clients of male coaches with clients of female coaches, and we found surprisingly no significant differences. If all client profiles are compared to coach profiles, then they are only significantly different for female coaches and for coaches who identify as coaches in their profession (compare Tables 2 and 4). The fact that these coach differences are not confirmed by the client scores provides strong indications that the differences found in Table 2, at least on the gender and job description dimensions, are mainly due to self-perception of the coaches.

Discussion

The aims of this study were twofold. First, we wanted to know whether self-reported behavior profiles would change significantly with coach properties such as age, gender, job description, and nationality. Second, we wanted to check how client-reported behavioral profiles might be different from self-reported profiles of the same coach.

The Model and Questionnaire

With the CBQ, the workplace coaching and consulting professions have a reliable and intuitive tool at their disposal to measure coaching behaviors through the eyes of coaches, consultants, manager-coaches, clients, and even observers. The statistical properties of this tool show that it can be used to make measurements that result in highly personal feedback to coaches, either given by themselves or by others. In the current version of the CBQ, this feedback is related to a large norm group of managers, consultants, and coaches; therefore, participants are automatically compared with the norm-group results of the group that they belong to. Moreover, all participants receive percentile scores that indicate what proportion of the norm group with their particular job description (manager, consultant, coach) score lower than they do on each of the six dimensions.

Summarizing, one can think of the model as having three push, coach-centered (directive) sets of behaviors—Prescribing, Informing, and Confronting—and three pull, client-centered (nondirective) sets of behaviors—Exploring, Supporting, and Releasing. The six classes of intervention illustrate that as a coach you have a very broad range of interventions at your disposal. At any point of time in a coaching conversation you will have the options of

- Not doing anything, devoting your energy to following the learner and to listening;
- Offering a piece of direction, either by means of advice or suggestion (Prescribing) or by means of information that might help the learner (Informing);
- Offering a challenge to the learner, consisting of a different way to look at his or her issues (Confronting); or
- Offering facilitative interventions by providing warmth and support (Supporting), making an effort to summarize and inquire more deeply into the issues at stake (Exploring), or advancing an invitation to open up emotional undercurrents to the issues and the conversation itself (Releasing).

Each of these can have very different effects on your learner/coachee and the conversation. One might argue that a truly skillful coach would be able to

- Have a view and careful consideration on when to lead and when to follow, choosing an appropriate balance between direction and facilitation;
- Select and apply intervention styles appropriate to particular learners in particular situations;
- Use a range of skills and interventions within each style for maximum effectiveness;
- Use the styles consistently in terms of metacommunication and nonverbal support; and
- Move cleanly and elegantly from one intervention to another as required.

The Findings

In this article we have shown that there are systematic differences in our sample between various groups of coaches and between coaches and their clients. Women score themselves higher on the

nondirective interventions and lower on the directive interventions than their male counterparts whereas they do not differ significantly in the amount of challenge and support they think they give their coachees. Executive coaching has often been regarded as a female profession because it is geared toward receiving the client, nurturing the ideas and development of the client, and helping to look after the client's agenda. These are perceived to be traditionally and biologically more female roles (see, e.g., de Haan, 2008). Therefore, it is interesting if these self-perceptions can also be picked up as different behavior in practice. There is already some evidence that female coaches are slightly more effective in the eyes of clients than their male counterparts (de Haan, Grant, Burger, & Eriksson, 2016).

Similar to the gender differences, older coaches/consultants/managers score significantly lower on directive interventions than their younger colleagues. They also reported giving less active support whereas their emotionally Releasing (cathartic) interventions are more prevalent in their self-scores.

Job role also influences the scores on the questionnaire. Manager-coaches, consultant-coaches, and professional coaches self-score progressively lower on directive and supportive interventions whereas they score themselves progressively higher on nondirective (Exploring and Releasing) interventions. In other words, participants who describe their role as coaches report a more coaching (nondirective) profile in their scores. This may be the influence of progressive acculturation in the consulting and coaching professions, where coaches learn to think about their interventions progressively in terms of more typical coaching interventions (i.e., the pull behaviors within Exploring and Releasing). In fact, we find that if client scores are compared to all three categories, the discrepancies are largest for professional coaches, which indicates that coaches may be changing their self-perceptions more than their actual coaching behaviors.

There are some significant differences in scores when measured against country of origin. We found substantial differences in terms of how many Confronting interventions have been reported—highest in the Netherlands, midlevel in Belgium, and lowest in the United Kingdom. There are also significant differences in terms of how many Exploring interventions have been reported: highest in the United Kingdom and lower in Belgium and the Netherlands. Similar contrasts of "directness" and "nonavoidance" were reported by Van Meurs (2003) in her doctoral thesis on negotiations between Dutch and U.K. managers. From personal experience and studying cultural assessments of national cultures (e.g., the dimension of internal vs. external control in Trompenaars' well-known seven-dimensional model), we recognize the progressive increase in Confronting from the United Kingdom, to Belgium, and then to the Netherlands.

Clients of workplace coaches are scoring coaches significantly higher on directive interventions whereas they score them significantly lower on some nondirective (cathartic) interventions. Three effects are significant; clients see their coaches do more Prescribing and Informing and less Releasing than coaches are scoring themselves. We believe this shows that coaches may be more central in their interventions than they themselves realize: They may be giving more advice (Prescribing) and information (Informing) than they think. Moreover, they do not go as deeply into the client's inner world and emotions (Releasing) as they perceive themselves doing. We do not know if any of this general feedback for coaches is related to skill; however, it is tempting to think that these coaches are sometimes so busy with their own ideas and suggestions that they attend insufficiently to their clients' emotional processes. It is certain that their clients are saying to some significant extent that the coaches are doing this more than they themselves think. It would be worth testing if clients also wish their coaches to be less advisory and informing and more in tune with their own highly personal emotional experience. We know from other studies that clients may perceive the empathic behavior of coaches differently from coaches themselves (Will et al., 2016) and that they perceive effectiveness of coaching quite differently from their coaches (de Haan, Grant, Burger, & Eriksson, 2016). Given that the client sample is still small and the effects are nonetheless large, we believe more

research needs to be done and are looking forward to replicating this analysis with larger samples.

We have also found evidence that the differences in self-perceptions of coaches are not replicated by their clients, namely for the gender and job description dimensions where this could be tested. The sample is still relatively small; therefore, we need to be cautious in drawing conclusions. However, it seems that perhaps self-identification of female and professional coaches is more nondirective whereas this does not show up as different behavior toward the clients. It is always possible that more sophisticated coaches change something about their behavior that the client does not even notice while still being affected; however, as yet there is no evidence for a differential effect on clients.

Limitations of This Research

We have made use of a self-report questionnaire for the coaches; therefore, there is a risk of same-source bias, although this risk should be limited because we are only comparing discreet facts (age, gender, job description, nationality) with continuous scales of self-observation of coaching interventions. However, there are other problems with self-scoring, particularly when one wants to view the scores as reflective of coaching interventions of the kind one can also measure in other ways (e.g., as perceived by a client or an observer).

Coaches, consultants, and managers may have answered in the direction of "how they want to become" rather than "how they see themselves right now" (although the questionnaire asks specifically not to do that). Likewise, coaches/consultants/managers may have answered in the direction of "how they ought to coach" rather than "how they coach right now" (social-desirability bias).

In addition, coaches/consultants/managers may experience difficulty in observing their own interventions (same-source bias), or they may be unsure, self-critical, or defensive in sharing their self-observation. They may have interpreted the descriptions of interventions more or less extremely and may have had a "central tendency" bias on all dimensions (although the ipsative nature of the questionnaire has a considerable mitigating effect on such response biases). Coaches/managers/consultants may have interpreted the descriptions through different cultural, linguistic, or educational-background lenses.

These reporting biases may make it difficult to attribute results to the independent variables that we have measured. There could also well be other underlying variables that we have not measured directly that moderate the effects that we have found (e.g., to do with metacommunication, relational orientation, or attachment styles).

Another limitation of this research is the relatively low volume of feedback scores from clients of coaching. However, the matched $n = 91$ sample seems large enough to compare coach and client scores in the same coaching relationship, detecting both significant correlations and significant biases. This promises well for future research on coach-client differences in their appreciation of coaching relationships.

Conclusion

This study shows that we can now reliably measure a wide range of coaching interventions and make reliable comparisons between samples of coaches and between the client and coach perspective on those same interventions. There seem to be systematic scoring patterns in terms of directive and nondirective coaching styles and in terms of the amount of support or challenge provided by the coach/consultant/manager. One might think of the patterns we found as indicative of development and adaptation, with older and professional coaches perceiving more typical nondirective and client-centered coaching behaviors over time and as they specialize more as coaches. We have also found some indications that these are mainly self-perceptions of the professional coaches, which are not shared by their clients. In addition, we found some confirmation that one can see coaching as more a female profession with females perceiving more typical coaching skills in their own work. Finally, we have found some evidence of coaches adapting to their national cultures and becoming

more confrontational, direct, or explorational in cultures where that is more the norm. However, the systematic patterns we have found still need to be linked back to measurable behaviors and skills. Because this is not yet the case, we have only found evidence for patterns in the perceptions of coaching skills.

As a next step, it would be interesting to bring in the observer's perspective (both during live sessions and based on recordings) and to compare scores directly on the same coaching relationship or session. The CBQ tool could be further modified to rate observed behavior both in terms of frequency of occurrence and impact/effectiveness. When doing so, we believe this model should be extended with questions aiming at assessing the subtle overtones, nuances, and ulterior transactions contained within normal conversational behavior that we mentioned at the beginning of this contribution. Ultimately, a tool such as this can be used to assess the efficacy or skill of a coach to produce desired outcomes—namely, when scores on this instrument are correlated with reliable outcome measures (e.g., in randomized controlled trials). Only at that time will we be able to establish whether the significant differences we have found between different coaching professionals are indicative of a different approach in their conversations and whether they correlate with differences in competence and ultimately in their effectiveness as coaches.

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Appendix

Coaching Behaviors Questionnaire

You are asked to complete this questionnaire on your coaching style in helping conversations. It lists a number of different ways in which you might act, and asks you to indicate how you tend to act with people as a coach. You can in principle complete this questionnaire both when you are a qualified (internal or external) executive coach and when you are a leader or manager, thinking about how you coach others inside your department or organization, and direct reports.

What is your job role?
❍ Manager (1)
❍ Coach (2)
❍ Consultant (3)
What is your gender?
❍ Male (1)
❍ Female (2)
What is your age?
❍ Under 20 (1)
❍ 21–25 (2)
❍ 26–30 (3)
❍ 31–35 (4)
❍ 36–40 (5)
❍ 41–50 (6)
❍ 51–55 (7)
❍ 56–60 (8)
❍ 61+ (9)
What is your country of origin?

Instructions

Listed below are many different ways in which you may act with people as a coach. In the following sets of four statements, please distribute 10 points over each set, according to how you tend to act with people as a coach. Please always use all 10 points. You may use zeros, if you feel they are appropriate.

None of these behaviors are good or bad in themselves. So there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Don't spend too long considering your replies: a quick spontaneous answer is likely to be the most valuable. You will get the most benefit from this exercise if you are completely honest. The questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

(*Appendix continues*)

Please answer with respect to "how you tend to act with people as a coach" rather than "how you prefer to act."

Example "When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."

a _0_ sit still and listen

b _6_ formulate and summarize their goals

c _2_ ask them what they would advise themselves

d _2_ give my own view

_____

Total _10_

Questionnaire

Please distribute 10 points over each statement and please answer with respect to "how you tend to act with people as a coach" rather than "how you prefer to act."

"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."

1a. let them know how a task, meeting, or job can be done really well _____

1b. capture my understanding of what they say in a model _____

1c. give constructive feedback regarding their mistakes or issues _____

1d. ask them how they feel about a current difficulty _____

"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."

2a. share my understanding of opportunities to learn and improve _____

2b. tell them how to get started on a task _____

2c. encourage them to feel good about themselves _____

2d. let them get on with finding their own answers _____

"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."

3a. note areas where I see room for improvement _____

3b. encourage them to express their feelings and emotions _____

3c. ask for their interpretation of a particular situation _____

3d. show my willingness to help _____

"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."

4a. say, "What else would you like to cover?" _____

4b. say, "You come across to me differently, namely. . ." _____

4c. say, "I would suggest you do . . ." _____

4d. check the logic of a statement _____

"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."

5a. say, "To my knowledge. . ." _____

5b. say, "How does it feel to talk about this?" _____

5c. say, "How can I help you with this?" _____

5d. make suggestions regarding "homework" for the next meeting _____

"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."

6a. offer positive and affirming feedback _____

6b. point out that they could look at the issue in a different way _____

6c. help them to express more personal insights or feelings _____

6d. advise them of what action to take _____

"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."

7a. reveal how I may be affected in our relationship _____

7b. ask them what next to explore _____

7c. challenge them on the consequences of their actions _____

7d. explain what is known about a task _____

(*Appendix continues*)

"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
8a. check whether I am being helpful _____
8b. ask for desired outcomes for the meeting _____
8c. raise what sense I am getting of how they are in the here and now _____
8d. tell them where to go to find information and help _____
"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
9a. help them to reflect on their experiences _____
9b. express willingness to support them _____
9c. advocate a particular solution or approach _____
9d. make them aware of what they could consider changing _____
"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
10a. give them honest feedback about the impact of their behavior _____
10b. show them how to correct their mistakes _____
10c. use a model to summarize their queries or issues _____
10d. be honest about my warmth and care _____
"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
11a. help them to recognize their own emotions and how these impact on their work _____
11b. challenge them when they are possibly being defensive _____
11c. indicate it might be a good idea to change _____
11d. listen deeply as they review their issues or experiences _____
"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
12a. persuade them to take a particular approach _____
12b. ask them how they can apply what they have learnt _____
12c. sum up what choices they seem to have _____
12d. speak with them about their emotions, e.g. of being upset or angry _____
"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
13a. show them how their views can possibly be contradicted _____
13b. offer an explanation of what has happened _____
13c. ask them how they feel about their success _____
13d. offer them support when they are in difficulties _____
"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
14a. provide opportunities for them to open up more personal queries _____
14b. give them an example of how I would approach the issue _____
14c. appreciate the value of their ideas, beliefs, opinions _____
14d. ask open questions to promote new insights _____
"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
15a. give information about my own experience _____
15b. welcome them as a person _____
15c. help them to state their present understanding of the issues _____
15d. challenge what they are saying _____
"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
16a. recommend how to approach or do something _____
16b. give them information that they may use to achieve a task _____
16c. if they are negative or pessimistic, confront them with a positive angle _____
16d. ask them how they feel about a problematic issue _____

"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
17a. encourage them to find their own solutions and answers _____
17b. show genuine appreciation for a job well done _____
17c. point to information which may be relevant _____
17d. propose what I believe to be the best course of action _____
"When working with people as a coach, I tend to do the following . . ."
18a. make myself accessible to them when needed _____
18b. ask them to express feelings which may be blocking them _____
18c. inquire into what they want to achieve _____
18d. challenge them about what they may be avoiding _____