

Development of Coaches: IV. Does Age Make A Difference?

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This report is the fifth in a series that convey and interpret results from two versions of a questionnaire that was initially prepared by the Development of Coaches Research Collaborative in cooperation with the Collaborative Research Network of the Society for Psychotherapy Research. [Note: for those readers who are familiar with the first four reports, I recommend that you move immediately to the "focus of study" and results sections of this fifth report, given that the initial sections of this report provide background material regarding the two surveys that was already covered in the first reports.]

Critique and Comment

Before moving directly into this fifth report, I wish to honor a criticism regarding this series of Development of Coaches reports, offered by my colleague, Rey Carr. He made this comment after reviewing the fourth report (on gender):

When it comes to surveys, particularly those conducted via the Internet, it makes little difference if the survey was completed "by a widely ranging group of coaches," or by organizations with "no stake in the outcomes," or distributed by "practitioners." What counts is the reliability and validity of the survey.

The results of the survey are great for talking points or a place to start a dialogue about the issues raised, but they cannot and should not be understood as representative of coaches. These surveys are typically suspect when it comes to generalizing the results to the coaching industry or population. It doesn't mean you can draw conclusions, but the data should always be accompanied by a set of "limitations" or "cautions" in using the data.

I agree with Rey regarding the credibility of Internet surveys. It is much better to gather opinions, perspectives and concerns from respondents through in-depth personal interviews, observation of performance rather than just rhetoric, and phenomenological single-person case

studies. If the field and culture of professional coaching is to become “evidence-rich” and research-based, as Francine Campone and Deepa Awal noted in the first report based on this Development of Coaching project, then we need much more than Internet-based survey results. However, as Rey Carr himself has noted, the results from the current surveys can be of value as “talking points” and places to start the dialogue. By offering these provocative findings, we are providing an incentive for what in one of our previous reports we called the creation of a culture of collaboration. These survey results might even provide sufficient irritation to motivate someone or some organization with sufficient resources to conduct highly quality research. I would fully welcome such an initiative.

Background

Completed in 2009 by 153 coaches from throughout the world, the first survey was followed by a second version that was distributed in 2015 (with only minor editing changes) by the Library of Professional Coaching in cooperation with ITLCInsights. Fifty eight coaches provided responses to the second questionnaire -- yielding a total of 211 responses to the two surveys. The time interval between the two surveys was six years, enabling us to get a preliminary sense of possible changes in coaching attitudes over this period of time, as well as a sense of stability (low levels of difference in mean scores and variance) in the attitudes of professional coaches regarding their own development.

Unlike most coaching surveys, the two surveys conducted in 2009 and 2015 were directed toward those actually doing the coaching, rather than the users of coaching services. These surveys were completed by a widely ranging group of coaches – in terms of geography, schools of coaching, age and years of experience in providing coaching services. These two surveys are also distinctive in that they have been being conducted by organizations (the Library of Professional Coaching and ITLCInsights) that have no specific stake in the outcomes, and are being distributed to practitioners at many levels of practice and status. These surveys are truly "neutral" and "democratizing" – though, as Rey Carr has noted, the results obtained via Survey Monkey must be considered quite tentative and suggestive rather than definitive.

Methods

Both versions of the Development of Coaches questionnaire are based on one devised by the Collaborative Research Network of the Society for Psychotherapy Research in their international study of development among professional psychotherapists described by Orlinsky and Rønnestad in *How Psychotherapists Develop* (Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2005). Both of the coaching studies include questions that parallel those used in the Society's Development of Psychotherapists Common Core Questionnaire. This enables us not only to study varied aspects of coaches' development, but also compare responses of coaches to these made by psychotherapists. Many questions have been posed over the past twenty years concerning the similarities and differences between professional coaching and psychotherapy. The data being gathered in these two surveys will provide some of the first answers regarding this comparison.

Modification of Development of Psychotherapists Survey

In adapting the questionnaire, members of the Development of Coaches Research Collaborative drew on their own experiences as coaches to ask questions that they hoped would seem meaningful and relevant to those responding to the questionnaire. The majority of questions could be answered quickly by checking alternatives that most closely reflected the respondent's own experience.

Instructions to the Respondents

In the case of both surveys, respondents were asked to answer all of the questions and were provided with the following framework:

The complete set of responses provides us with a fuller understanding of your own work and the context in which you work. You may find these questions offer a useful opportunity to reflect on your own coaching career. If any seem difficult to answer exactly, give your best estimate and continue. To ensure confidentiality, the questionnaire is completed anonymously. Information you provide will be used only for research purposes.

Designers of the original survey proposed that the respondents would benefit in two ways. These two benefits made this truly a collaborative effort between those who designed the questionnaire and those who completing it. Following is a statement offered to those considering completion of the second survey:

You can sign up to receive the report findings from this study when they become available. . . . These reports will also be made available at no charge to the general coaching public through the Library of Professional Coaching. The reports will identify which modes of development have been found to be the most effective. . . . [Furthermore, results from this survey may] increase the credibility of the coaching profession. As Francine Campone, one of the creators and initiators of the original survey has indicated, a culture of research and evidence needs to be created in the field of professional coaching. The more we learn from one another about professional coaching practices, the more collectively knowledgeable we will become. The more knowledgeable we become, the greater the opportunity for building evidence-based coaching strategies and tools. The better the strategies and tools the more effective we will be as coaching professionals. The more effective we become as a profession, the greater the demand will be for our services.

Focus of the Study

This fifth report is the second in a series regarding potential differences in responses to the Development of Coaches survey based on demographic factors. In the initial study, we focused on a typical distinguishing feature among human beings (and coaches): the gender of respondents. Of those who responded to the first survey, a major (66.2%) were females. Of the 58 respondents to Survey Two, 77.6% were female – a slightly higher percentage than in Survey One. This second study regarding potential demographic differences focuses on the second obvious demographic: age.

In analyzing the data for this fifth report, we combined the responses to both surveys – having found them to be closely aligned in our previous studies (using the same data that are being analyzed in this report). Furthermore, we went beyond the calculation of means and variances for two different age populations: (1) under 60 years of age and (2) 60 years of age or more. We

conducted simple T-Tests to determine if the differences between the response of the younger and older coaches were significantly different regarding any of the questions we presented in our four previous reports.

While we present the mean, variance and T-Test Scores in the next section of this report for each of the seven questions on which we focused in the previous three studies, the reader should be informed (as was also the case with the study of gender differences) that no significant differences were found for the responses to any of the items contained in these seven questions. In fact, none of the T-Tests produced scores greater than 1.00. The degree of congruence between younger and older coaches in their responses to these two survey is truly remarkable. Apparently, age doesn't make much of a difference when it comes to the perspectives held by professional coaches and responses to challenges faced by coaches (or at least those responding to these two surveys).

Results

As we did in the first four report we will offer basic descriptive statistics (mean and variance) for all of the statements associated with each of these questions. The mean scores will give us an initial impression regarding the extent to which respondents rated themselves low or high on each item, while the variance scores will give us an initial impression of the extent to which respondents tend to agree with one another in their rating of each item. In addition, we provide T-Test scores for each item to determine the extent to which age differences are significant. In each table, we also indicate whether the magnitude of T-Test scores reach at least a .05 level of probable significance. As we have already noted, there are no T-Test scores that reach this level of significance. Probably the most interesting result concerns the basic division between young and older coaches. We found that the median age is 60, with about half of the respondents (123) being less than 60 years of age and the other half (113) being 60 years of age or more. In other words, we are looking at a "graying" population of coaches. Does this represent the status of the field, with regard to age, or just the status of those who completed one of these two surveys?

Question: Since you began formally working as a coach . . .

	Under 60 Years of Age	60 Years of Age or Older	T-Test	P Level
<i>How much have you changed overall as a coach?</i>	Mean=4.07 Variance=0.89	Mean=3.96 Variance =0.98	0.43	>.05
<i>How much do you regard this as progress or improvement?</i>	Mean=4.33 Variance=0.71	Mean=4.42 Variance =0.81	0.49	>.05
<i>How much do you regard this as a decline or impairment?</i>	Mean=0.13 Variance=0.19	Mean=0.13 Variance =0.27	0.10	>.05
<i>How much have you succeeded in overcoming any past limitations in your coaching skills and knowledge?</i>	Mean=3.94 Variance=0.63	Mean=3.87 Variance =0.96	0.57	>.05
<i>How much have you realized your potential as a coach?</i>	Mean=3.85 Variance=0.94	Mean=3.73 Variance =1.46	0.46	>.05

Question: Overall at the PRESENT time . . .

	Under 60 Years of Age	60 Years of Age or Older	T-Test	P Level
<i>How effective are you at co-creating the working partnership with clients?</i>	Mean=4.29 Variance=0.52	Mean=4.47 Variance=0.38	0.06	>.05
<i>How authentically personal do you feel while working with clients?</i>	Mean=4.48 Variance=0.40	Mean=4.64 Variance=0.25	0.05	>.05
<i>How good is your general theoretical understanding of coaching?</i>	Mean=4.20 Variance=0.65	Mean=4.28 Variance=0.60	0.48	>.05
<i>How empathetic are you in relating to clients with whom you have relatively little in common?</i>	Mean=4.32 Variance=0.65	Mean=4.36 Variance=0.58	0.76	>.05
<i>How effective are you in communicating your understanding and concern to your clients?</i>	Mean=4.35 Variance=0.42	Mean=4.51 Variance=0.34	0.07	>.05
<i>How much mastery do you feel you have of the techniques and</i>	Mean=3.80 Variance=0.71	Mean=3.99 Variance=0.67	0.10	>.05

<i>strategies involved in practicing coaching?</i>				
<i>How well do you understand what happens moment by moment during coaching sessions?</i>	Mean=3.94 Variance=0.83	Mean=4.08 Variance=0.66	0.25	>.05
<i>How effective are you at stimulating client insight?</i>	Mean=4.23 Variance=0.61	Mean=4.36 Variance=0.54	0.24	>.05
<i>How much precision, subtlety and finesse have you attained in your coaching work?</i>	Mean=3.87 Variance=0.81	Mean=3.97 Variance=0.85	0.45	>.05
<i>How confident do you feel in your role as a coach?</i>	Mean=4.20 Variance=0.61	Mean=4.29 Variance=0.72	0.44	>.05

Question: Currently, how often do you feel . . .

	Under 60 Years of Age	60 Years of Age or Older	T-Test	P Level
<i>Lacking confidence that you can provide a beneficial effect for a client.</i>	Mean=1.52 Variance=0.42	Mean=1.42 Variance =0.58	0.35	>.05
<i>Unsure how best to deal effectively with a client.</i>	Mean=1.59 Variance=0.43	Mean=1.48 Variance =0.41	0.21	>.05
<i>In danger of losing control of a coaching conversation to a client.</i>	Mean=0.94 Variance=0.57	Mean=0.95 Variance =0.58	0.98	>.05

<i>Unable to have much real empathy for a client's experiences.</i>	Mean=0.70 Variance=0.38	Mean=0.62 Variance =0.35	0.36	>.05
<i>Uneasy that your personal values make it difficult to maintain an appropriate attitude toward a client.</i>	Mean=0.60 Variance=0.32	Mean=0.73 Variance =0.40	0.15	>.05
<i>Distressed by your inability to impact a client's life or work situation.</i>	Mean=1.05 Variance=0.58	Mean=1.00 Variance =0.62	0.67	>.05
<i>Troubled by ethical issues that have arisen in your work with a client.</i>	Mean=0.57 Variance=0.40	Mean=0.65 Variance =0.45	0.36	>.05
<i>Irritated by a client who seems to be actively blocking your efforts.</i>	Mean=1.05 Variance=0.60	Mean=1.00 Variance =0.62	0.67	>.05
<i>Unable to comprehend the essence of a client's problem.</i>	Mean=0.88 Variance=0.47	Mean=0.85 Variance =0.42	0.76	>.05
<i>Unable to find something to like or respect in a client.</i>	Mean=0.34 Variance=0.32	Mean=0.41 Variance =0.35	0.38	>.05
<i>Conflicted about how to reconcile obligations to a client and equivalent obligation to others.</i>	Mean=0.82 Variance=0.72	Mean=0.77 Variance =0.60	0.67	>.05
<i>Bogged down with a client in a relationship that seems to be going nowhere.</i>	Mean=1.07 Variance=0.56	Mean=0.99 Variance =0.54	0.47	>.05
<i>Frustrated with a client for wasting your time</i>	Mean=0.73 Variance=0.51	Mean=0.65 Variance =0.49	0.46	>.05

Question: When in difficulty, how often do you . . .

	Under 60 Years of Age	60 Years of Age or Older	T-Test	P Level
<i>a. Try to see the problem from a different perspective</i>	Mean=3.87 Variance=0.76	Mean=4.14 Variance =0.55	0.02	>.05
<i>b. Share your experience of the difficulty with a client</i>	Mean=2.84 Variance=1.54	Mean=2.99 Variance =1.85	0.43	>.05
<i>c. Discuss the problem with a more experienced colleague</i>	Mean=3.15 Variance=1.41	Mean=3.28 Variance =1.85	0.50	>.05
<i>d. Consult relevant articles or books</i>	Mean=2.77 Variance=1.79	Mean=2.69 Variance =1.52	0.69	>.05
<i>e. Involve another professional or organization in the case</i>	Mean=1.67 Variance=1.78	Mean=1.84 Variance =2.16	0.43	>.05
<i>f. Make changes in your coaching contract with a client</i>	Mean=1.54 Variance=1.49	Mean=1.69 Variance =1.93	0.42	>.05
<i>g. Simply hope that things will improve eventually</i>	Mean=0.81 Variance=0.80	Mean=0.68 Variance =0.55	0.29	>.05
<i>h. Seriously consider terminating coaching</i>	Mean=1.17 Variance=0.80	Mean=1.16 Variance =0.83	0.09	>.05
<i>i. Review privately with yourself how the problem has arisen</i>	Mean=3.62 Variance=1.37	Mean=3.75 Variance =1.31	0.42	>.05
<i>j. Just give yourself permission to experience difficult or disturbing feelings</i>	Mean=3.11 Variance=1.18	Mean=3.35 Variance =1.25	0.13	>.05

<i>k. See whether you and your client can deal together with the difficulty</i>	Mean=3.17 Variance=1.52	Mean=3.70 Variance =1.00	0.00	>.05
<i>l. Sign up for a conference or workshop that might bear on the problem</i>	Mean=1.55 Variance=1.57	Mean=1.49 Variance =1.65	0.73	>.05
<i>m. Modify your stance or approach with a client</i>	Mean=3.17 Variance=1.17	Mean=3.55 Variance =1.25	0.03	>.05
<i>n. Avoid dealing with the problem for the present</i>	Mean=0.93 Variance=0.67	Mean=0.93 Variance =0.76	0.83	>.05
<i>o. Show your frustration to the client</i>	Mean=0.75 Variance=0.81	Mean=0.79 Variance =0.77	0.84	>.05
<i>p. Explore the possibility of referring the client to another coach</i>	Mean=1.42 Variance=0.96	Mean=1.76 Variance =1.21	0.02	>.05
<i>q. Refer the client to some other non-coaching professional</i>	Mean=1.44 Variance=1.14	Mean=1.87 Variance =1.58	0.01	>.05

Question: In your RECENT coaching how often . . .

	Under 60 Years of Age	60 Years of Age and Older	T-Test	P Level
<i>Do you feel you are changing as a coach?</i>	Mean=3.67 Variance=1.22	Mean=3.52 Variance =1.14	0.32	>.05
<i>Does this change feel like progress or improvement?</i>	Mean=4.21 Variance=0.91	Mean=4.03 Variance =1.01	0.16	>.05

<i>Does this change feel like decline or impairment?</i>	Mean=0.11 Variance=0.17	Mean=0.18 Variance =0.22	0.27	>.05
<i>Do you feel you are overcoming past limitations as a coach?</i>	Mean=3.48 Variance=1.57	Mean=3.54 Variance =1.61	0.71	>.05
<i>Do you feel you are becoming more skillful in practicing coaching?</i>	Mean=4.13 Variance=0.93	Mean=4.04 Variance =0.93	0.53	>.05
<i>Do you feel you are deepening your understanding of coaching?</i>	Mean=4.15 Variance=0.96	Mean=4.12 Variance =0.90	0.85	>.05
<i>Do you feel a growing sense of enthusiasm about doing coaching?</i>	Mean=4.11 Variance=1.17	Mean=3.88 Variance =1.45	0.14	>.05
<i>Do you feel you are becoming disillusioned about coaching?</i>	Mean=0.47 Variance=0.92	Mean=0.41 Variance =0.75	0.65	>.05
<i>Do you feel you are losing your capacity to respond empathetically?</i>	Mean=0.06 Variance=0.08	Mean=0.25 Variance =0.70	0.03	>.05
<i>Do you feel your performance is becoming mainly routine?</i>	Mean=0.50 Variance=0.84	Mean=0.44 Variance =0.59	0.57	>.05
<i>How capable do you feel to guide the development of other coaches?</i>	Mean=3.58 Variance=1.93	Mean=3.70 Variance =1.87	0.52	>.05
<i>How important to you is your further development as a coach?</i>	Mean=4.70 Variance=0.58	Mean=4.43 Variance =0.96	0.02	>.05

As we move to our report on the final two questions, we wish to note that the respondent scale changes from a 1-5 rating to a scale that ranging from plus 3 to minus 3. Hence, the mean scores will usually be lower than is the case with the previous questions.

Question: How much influence has each of the following had on your OVERALL development as a coach?

	Under 60 Years of Age	60 Years of Age and Older	T-Test	P Level
<i>Experiences in coaching clients</i>	Mean=2.72 Variance=0.29	Mean=2.79 Variance =0.28	0.39	>.05
<i>Taking coaching specific courses, seminars or workshops (including online courses)</i>	Mean=2.27 Variance=0.86	Mean=2.30 Variance =0.86	0.84	>.05
<i>Collaborating with other coaches</i>	Mean=2.14 Variance=0.76	Mean=1.99 Variance =0.88	0.29	>.05
<i>Getting formal supervision, mentoring or consultation</i>	Mean=2.11 Variance=1.11	Mean=1.98 Variance =1.16	0.37	>.05
<i>Having informal case discussion with colleagues</i>	Mean=1.79 Variance=1.09	Mean=1.68 Variance =1.09	0.50	>.05
<i>Reading books or journals relevant to your coaching practice</i>	Mean=2.02 Variance=0.70	Mean=1.90 Variance =0.60	0.40	>.05
<i>Observing coaches in workshops, films or on tapes</i>	Mean=1.48 Variance=1.13	Mean=1.54 Variance =1.34	0.64	>.05

<i>Getting personal coaching</i>	Mean=2.20 Variance=0.97	Mean=2.11 Variance =1.03	0.52	>.05
<i>Giving formal supervision, mentor coaching, or consultation to other coaches</i>	Mean=1.75 Variance=1.33	Mean=1.82 Variance =1.34	0.72	>.05
<i>Teaching coaching courses or seminars (face to face or online)</i>	Mean=1.57 Variance=1.76	Mean=1.89 Variance =1.70	0.11	>.05
<i>Doing coaching related research</i>	Mean=1.23 Variance=1.54	Mean=1.07 Variance =1.34	0.40	>.05
<i>The institutional conditions in which you practice</i>	Mean=1.21 Variance=1.31	Mean=1.08 Variance =1.40	0.50	>.05
<i>Experiences in your personal life</i>	Mean=2.24 Variance=0.68	Mean=2.10 Variance =0.91	0.24	>.05

Question: How much influence does each of the following have on your CURRENT development as a coach?

	Under 60 Years of Age	60 Years of Age and Over	T-Test	P Level
<i>Experiences in coaching with clients</i>	Mean=2.29 Variance=0.76	Mean=2.64 Variance =0.43	0.26	>.05
<i>Taking courses, seminars or workshops (including online courses)</i>	Mean=1.86 Variance=0.84	Mean=1.90 Variance =1.10	0.54	>.05

<i>Getting formal supervision or consultation</i>	Mean=1.21 Variance=1.66	Mean=1.78 Variance =1.32	0.32	>.05
<i>Having informal case discussion with colleagues</i>	Mean=1.79 Variance=1.00	Mean=1.82 Variance =0.82	0.28	>.05
<i>Reading books or journals relevant to your coaching practice</i>	Mean=1.79 Variance=0.89	Mean=1.85 Variance =0.91	0.65	>.05
<i>Getting life coaching for yourself</i>	Mean=1.07 Variance=1.40	Mean=1.57 Variance =1.64	0.47	>.05
<i>Getting coaching on your coaching work</i>	Mean=1.23 Variance=1.58	Mean=1.56 Variance =1.52	0.64	>.05
<i>Coaching other coaches on professional or life issues</i>	Mean=1.43 Variance=1.46	Mean=1.70 Variance =1.52	0.70	>.05
<i>Giving supervision or consultation to other coaches</i>	Mean=1.36 Variance=1.91	Mean=1.65 Variance =1.41	0.15	>.05
<i>Teaching coaching courses or seminars (face to face or online)</i>	Mean=1.21 Variance=1.90	Mean=1.72 Variance =1.90	0.31	>.05
<i>The workplace conditions in which you practice</i>	Mean=0.79 Variance=2.34	Mean=1.00 Variance =2.54	0.09	>.05
<i>Experiences in your personal life outside coaching</i>	Mean=2.00 Variance=1.92	Mean=1.76 Variance =1.39	0.26	>.05

Discussion

As we mentioned even before presenting these results, there do not appear to be any significant differences regarding any of the Development of Coaching questions as a function of age. As in the case of our demographic analysis concerning gender, we must look elsewhere, apparently, when seeking to determine the source of variance in the responses of coaches to the two surveys. And we should be reminded of Rey Carr's cautionary note regarding Survey Monkey results.

There is another possible conclusion – or at least hypothesis – that we might pose with regard to the results obtained. It might be that age differences are to be found at a different time of life. Perhaps we should have differentiated groups at an earlier age. Are there differences between coaches younger than 40 and those older, or between coaches under 30 and those who are now coaching at an older age? Are most of our attitudes about coaching pretty much frozen by the time we are in mid-life or a bit older?

While we might wish to test this hypothesis in future analyses of the results obtained, this is not a high priority, given the age of most coaches we surveyed. There simply are not many professional coaches who enter this field prior to entering their mid-life years. Is this because they don't have much credibility until they have a little gray in the hair and fairly extensive life experiences? Or perhaps it is because most clients are themselves a bit older and are looking for coaches who are at least the same age. As we have noted in other articles about the future of professional coaching (e.g. Skibbins and Bergquist, 2016), the future might produce more coaching of younger men and women – and these younger clients might look to peers or slightly older colleagues to serve as their coaches. We will have to see what occurs in our field.

Meanwhile, the next few studies in this series will focus not on demographics, but rather on the type and extent of training and education that professional coaches have obtained. Do these experiences have a lasting impact on the Development of Coaches? We are about to see if this the case. Meanwhile, we bid farewell to our brief exploration of two demographic variables: gender and age. These variables don't seem to make much of a difference in the world of professional coaching.

Reference

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