

A professional development study: The lifelong journeys of coaches

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Every coach is on a journey. The moment they enter a coach training programme or begin coaching, they enter a path of exploration with clients as well as beginning self-exploration, discernment and experiencing profound shifts. This study investigates that journey through the lens of professional development, expertise, and a way of being. Through semi-structured interviews of a wide range of coaches, from novice to expert, a set of differences along a spectrum has been compiled, along with development strategies to assist coaches on this journey toward expertise. Also explored is how coaches stay fit for purpose and an assessment of the demand for coach education, the offerings for such education, and an assessment of the real needs for coaches to develop toward expertise.

Keywords: Professional development, coaching, reflective practice, lifelong learning.

'Intellectual growth should commence at birth and only cease at death.' Albert Einstein

WE FREQUENTLY say that coaching is about transformation and change (Bennett & Bush, 2013). That is, transformation and change in a client. While competency models have been developed for the profession as a way to define standards of practice for a coach to facilitate change within their clients (Campone & Ruth, 2012; Vandaveer et al., 2016), the field has not fully explored what the process of change in the coach looks like as she transforms from a novice, through proficiency, to becoming an expert coach.

An examination of this transformation requires information from several domains. First, the field of education offers several theories on adult learning used to explain the process of professional development for individual change. Second, the field of cognitive psychology looks at the characteristics, stages and cognition of expertise. And finally, the field of positive psychology studies the significance of relationships in bringing about growth and change (e.g. a way of being). While much of the research tends to focus on teacher–student or leader–subordinate relationships, we can extrapolate this infor-

mation to understand coach–client relationships (i.e. how coaches learn and how they apply their knowledge and skills to support positive client outcomes).

This paper is intended to synthesise research on professional development practices and provide lessons and experiences among coach practitioners. Coaches can then, in turn, use this information to formulate and implement a personalised professional development plan. To protect privacy, the names of participants have been omitted from the narrative. Participants are simply referred to as 'coach' followed by a letter or an Arabic numeral.

Professional development

Adult education theory attempts to explain the process of professional development for individual change. Models relevant to the coaching context include: andragogy (Knowles, 1980), reflective practice (Dewey, 1910; Schön, 1983), transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990) and experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984).

Knowles' (1980) andragogy model states that adults have lifetime experiences to draw

upon to inform learning processes. The principles of the model suggest that self-directed, experiential and problem-centred approaches are best for enhancing adult learning practices. In turn, activities based on these principles increase motivation and enable achievement of adult learners (Knowles, 1980).

Reflective practice, another professional development activity, derives from the works of Dewey (1910) and Schön (1983). According to Dewey (1910), reflective practice refers to 'the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it' (p.6). This means the adult learner takes a questioning approach to learning, considering 'why' and 'how' questions. For Schön (1983), a reflective practitioner is one who is able to think in the moment or after a situation has occurred and uses feedback loops of experience, learning and practice to improve their work.

Mezirow (1990) introduced transformational learning to understand development as a process for changing an individual's frames of reference. Frames of reference refer to 'the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition and feelings' (Mezirow, 1997, p.5). Building on Mezirow's work, other models account for the role of context, varying nature of the catalysts of transformative learning, increased role of other ways of knowing and importance of relationships (Kitchenham, 2008; Taylor, 1997). Taylor (2007) finds that relationships that boost confidence and develop mutual trust and respect are the most significant factors for creating transformative learning experiences. Critical thinking and reflection – that is not just rationally based but also includes emotions, intuition, and empathy – are also important for transformative learning (Taylor, 2008).

Finally, there is Kolb's learning cycle, which stipulates that individuals learn from their life experiences, even on an everyday basis (Kolb, 1984). According to Kolb

(1984), any experience has the potential for learning, but reflecting, interpreting and experimenting are the active ingredients for yielding growth and development.

Expertise

Research on expertise in the field of cognitive psychology can also contribute to the professional development of coaches. The field has looked at these concepts to better understand the processes and outcomes of learning and performance. Much of the research has concluded that experts are made and not born (Ericsson et al., 2018). With the right ingredients, individuals can turn themselves into an expert of their craft.

In expert performance studies, psychologists have identified key characteristics that contribute to learning, including deliberate practice, motivation, coach or teacher role, feedback and performance (Ericsson & Smith, 1991). Deliberate practice – persistent training with full concentration – is an important piece of the expertise puzzle but not necessarily the only or leading factor (Macnamara et al., 2016). Practice is often guided by a skilled expert, coach or mentor who serves as a feedback loop. Training is a qualitative difference in paying attention, not a quantitative measure of clocking a certain number of hours (Ericsson, 2008; Goleman, 2013).

Studies on motivation characterise growth and learning as a drive to make progress and get better and better at something that matters (Herzberg et al., 1993). The yearning to learn and create new things is an innate human drive (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The emotive drive to be challenged and to comprehend guides behaviour and influences the choices individuals make (Lawrence & Nohria, 2002). In other words, the desire to become proficient in a craft is an important driver of behaviour. If desire or motivation is low then learning, or growth and development, may be a challenge.

Two stages models are also useful for the field of coaching: the Dreyfus model

of skill acquisition and Bloom's taxonomy. The Dreyfus model (Dreyfus, 2004; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2008) describes six different stages an individual must progress through to achieve mastery in which only a small number of experts achieve the final stage. Similarly, Bloom's taxonomy identifies three domains (cognitive, affective and psychomotor; Bloom et al., 1956). Each domain is broken down into levels of objectives, moving through the lowest-order processes to the highest (Krathwohl, 2002). Both models represent a progression in learning.

Cognitive psychology has looked at the automaticity of thinking processes to better understand learning (Howell, 1982; Taylor, 2007). Research has pointed out that automaticity plays an important role in expertise (Feltovich et al., 2006). Automaticity is the ability to do something through nonconscious thinking (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Working towards expertise means continually shifting away from autopilot (automaticity) and back into active, corrective attention (cognition; Foer, 2011). The intuition, or essence of being, that develops from this interactive process of learning is a combination of understanding the theory and becoming skilled at the practice of the craft (Fromm, 1956). The same research indicates that expertise also involves the ability to reflect and to adapt (Feltovich et al., 2006; Zimmerman, 2006). Being in tune with the self through reflective thinking means an individual can make necessary adjustments to practice, in the moment or in the future.

A way of being

In the field of positive psychology, Carl Rogers advocated for person-centred learning in his seminal work, *A Way of Being*, in 1980. He encouraged individuals to adopt a more person-centred mindset in order to tap into human potential. According to Rogers, an individual needs an environment that provides them with genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (being seen with unconditional positive regard), and empathy (being listened

to and understood) in order to grow and reach their full human potential (Rogers, 1980). This perspective on humaneness can be applied to the professional development of coaches. Coaches should nurture their environment to become more in touch with their mind, body and spirit. Professional development, then, entails developing the conditions that enhance a coach's own way of being.

Methods

A review of literature on adult learning from the fields of education, cognitive psychology and positive psychology were examined to inform the creation of qualitative interviews aimed at examining the perceptions, meanings and practices of professional development of coaches. An exploratory qualitative grounded theory methodology was applied to data collection and analysis to allow for emergent, descriptive themes (Charmaz, 2006). This approach was selected in order to get rich, detailed accounts of professional development.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format to allow for both structure and flexibility by providing consistency while allowing for opportunity to explore and to clarify responses. These interviews were used to better understand the experiences and insights of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Three samples were selected for this study. The first sample included 11 expert coaches (based on their credential, years of experience, and reputation in the field) who were selected using purposive sampling to get insights from advanced level practitioners. Skewing the sample allowed for preliminary findings to inform the second phase of interviews. The second sample included eight coaches who were chosen randomly from a volunteer panel of International Coach Federation (ICF)-identified coaches who had previously agreed to assist with research. This random (within-group) probability sample selected for different coaches based on ICF

credentials and no ICF credentials. ICF offers three levels of credentials: associate (ACC), professional (PCC), and master (MCC). For the third group of participants, a snowball sample was used to recruit five coaching supervisors. Supervisors provided their perspective on the professional development needs of coaches.

In total, 25 coaches voluntarily participated and reached saturation. Saturation, or point of redundancy, occurs when no new information or ideas surface during the data collection and analysis phases (Guest et al., 2006). Reaching saturation, or redundancy, in a qualitative study signals that sufficient data has been collected to yield results. Sampling targeted a broad sample of professional coaches from global settings and with different backgrounds, training and certifications in order to get a range of perspectives.

Participants resided in Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, UK and US. Of the 25 participants, 20 were ICF members and 5 were not a member of ICF. Out of the 20 ICF members, 18 held an ICF coaching credential (5 ACC, 9 PCC, 4 MCC). Age of the participants ranged from 41 to 68. Of the 25 participants, 19 were female, 6 were male. Coaching hours of the participants ranged from 500 to 14,000. As a highly educated group, the majority of the coaches, 18, had post-undergraduate college education (e.g. master's or doctoral degree). A majority of the coaches, 22, had also participated in some formal coach certification training.

The interview guide was sent to participants before their scheduled interview so they had time to reflect on their professional development and coaching experiences. Questions asked about their coaching background, their definition of effective coaching, skills required to perform effective coaching, their professional development activities, strategies and insights, their perspective on levels or stages of coaching, and their view on continuing education.

Interviews were conducted via phone, Skype or Zoom.

Field notes were used and entered into MAXQDA software for coding. Methods for coding, organising and analysing the data were adopted from grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). An eclectic combination of structural, descriptive, in vivo, holistic, provisional and thematic coding were applied to the qualitative data (Saldaña, 2013). Data from the documents were organised into major themes, categories and examples. The code system included 10 overarching codes broken down into 46 sub-codes and 109 in vivo codes. The iterative coding process resulted in two overarching themes and five sub-themes. As part of the analysis, checking with participants (member checks; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) was done to verify the main themes.

Results

Analysis resulted in a rich description of professional development experiences of coaches. The themes are derived from an interpretive paradigm getting at the interconnected and holistic qualities of professional development. The themes do not capture a linear logic of causation nor do they assume external generalisability (positivist paradigm). Instead, the themes are an interdependent mix of qualities that contribute to the self-development experience of coaches. This means the themes focus on the process and not the content of professional development.

The self-development experience

For coaches, staying fit for purpose means going on a journey of practice and engaging in reflective practice. The first theme, going on a journey, involves being a lifelong learner, modelling the way for transformation, and deepening belief in coaching. As a second theme, engaging in a reflective practice involves deepening coaching presence and taking care of self. The main takeaway from the narrative is that these practices are equally important for every level of expertise and experience.

Going on a journey of practice – A way of doing

'The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction not a destination.' (Carl Rogers)

Many of the coaches talked about both coaching and professional development in terms of a journey. As Coach B emphasised, 'the journey of becoming a coach is transformative in and of itself'. Going on the coaching journey means putting in quality practice and engaging in life experiences.

Many coaches talked about how just the act of coaching has helped them develop their practice. But putting in coaching hours on its own was not sufficient to grow. The professional development journey is not just about the amount of time invested but the quality of that time (Ericsson, 2008).

Many of the coaches referred to their previous life and work experiences as part of their journey for development. This is not to say that life experiences make for an effective coach, but significant life experience is part of the journey of learning. This appears to be in line with adult learning research – life experiences contribute to development (Kolb, 1984).

A journey of practice, quality time, and experiences involved the subthemes of being a lifelong learner, modelling the way for transformation, and deepening belief in both the process and the client. The professional development journey theme also supports the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition (Dreyfus, 2004).

Being a lifelong learner

'Professional development is a lifetime journey' (Coach G)

On the whole, participants viewed professional development as an ongoing pursuit. Coaches depicted themselves as lifelong learners, which means they are continuously seeking out and are open to personal and professional growth opportunities. As one of the expert coaches stated, professional development is about 'having the humility to realise that a coach is always in the process of learning, growing and devel-

oping' (Coach E). Continuous learning is about constantly increasing knowledge and expanding skills. This finding is in line with adult education theory that posits lifelong learning is a concept, a value, and a practice (Crowther & Sutherland, 2008).

Even those considered to be top in the field talked about the desire and need to continuously learn. Learning for the advanced coaches partly came from being a leader in the field – they are the ones teaching, mentoring, supervising, assessing, researching and writing for the field. They also turned to affiliations and collegiality by going to conferences to have conversations about coaching, the industry and future trends. Advanced-level coaches talked about their deliberate engagement in the field in terms of learning.

What was clear from the coaches is that continuous learning comes from a variety of sources, including engaging in life experiences, practicing coaching, reading books, attending trainings, or doing tai chi. As lifelong learners, many are constantly reading up on coaching and other fields related to their specialty area, such as neuroscience or leadership. They are learning through various activities in order to avoid stagnation and to tap into their potential.

For these coaches, they have learned from all different things and people. Lifelong learning is about trying to be aware of what is going on in the world, recognising what it means to live in a global community. Coach E emphasised this point, saying 'My whole life is a training ground'.

Modelling the way for transformation

Modelling the way for transformation means that the coaches were open to change within themselves in order to support transformation within their clients. Many see coaching as a way to make the world a better place by helping individuals and organisations make changes. For most of the coaches, change starts with the individual, and this includes the coach doing the coaching. For change to occur at the macro-societal level,

individual change is necessary – coaches included.

On the whole, coaches felt they should be responsible and accountable for their own professional development because that is what they demand of their clients. Coaching is about facilitating learning and awareness in the client; therefore, coaches felt they should be familiar with the process for themselves. As one coach said:

If I'm not passionate about growing and developing my skills and continually have a learner mentality, a lack of learner mentality, I imagine, would show up in my clients, and I want my clients to feel like I'm in there with them.' (Coach E).

This finding is in line with Silsbee's sentiments on creating client self-generation, 'coaches with integrity demonstrate the same levels of introspection and commitment to their development as they expect of their clients.' (Silsbee, 2010, p.291).

Supervisors concurred. As one supervisor observed:

If we [as a coach] don't know what it feels like to be a learner, how do we create the safety and trust to enable learning and change in our client[s]' (Coach W). *This means, 'coaches must be able to deepen their own awareness, fluency, and capacity to do the work.'* (Coach W)

Deepening belief in process and in client

A shift in belief in both the process and the client appeared to be part of the professional development journey for coaches. When coaches started out on their journey, they had more of what Dweck (2008) refers to as a performance mindset for learning. A performance mindset focuses on task competence in order to gain approving judgments from others. In doing so, coaches focused more on themselves than the client. Coaches talked about how they were absorbed in trying to ask the right question, applying a technique in the right way, or seeing results

when they first started out coaching.

As coaches progressed through their journey, they realised that they needed to get themselves out of the way in order to be fully available for their client. In order to believe, they had to go through their own journey of transformation, or 'aha' moments, to truly believe 'coaching actually works'. In the process, they shifted to what Dweck (2008) refers to as a learning or growth mindset. According to Dweck, a person with a learning mindset is someone who is motivated to increase their competence and to overcome challenging situations. A growth mindset sees obstacles as opportunities and as a constructive part of the learning process. Learning also means finding lessons and inspiration in the success of others. This shift meant coaches turned their focus to the client by allowing the client to own the session and do more of the work.

As coaches progressed on their journey, they let go of their mask of grandiosity and embraced humility and vulnerability, as supervisor Coach 2 described. Instead of thinking that they were supposed to have all the answers and ask all the right questions in a session, coaches recognised and accepted that even an expert cannot know everything. As one supervisor declared, 'We can't know it all' (Coach W). This shift meant that coaches could sit with themselves in not knowing everything and still show up to a session with a client with complete confidence.

Engaging in reflective practice – A way of being

For the majority of the coaches, their learning journey entailed engaging in some type of ongoing reflective practice in order to stay fit for purpose. This finding is in line with research on reflection and professional development (Schön, 1983). As one of the supervisors shared, reflective practice 'is about going deeper and discovering themselves and their impact on others and how they are impacted by others so that they are serving their client from the stance that they hold'.

What does a reflective practice look like? Strategies mentioned by coaches included: mindfulness, yoga, meditation, self-care, physical activities, spiritual practice, therapy, observing life, being curious, experimenting, listening to or watching coaching session recordings, taking notes of coaching sessions, journaling, going to trainings, and supervision. These reflective practice activities require having a 'rigorous self-discipline for self-awareness and self-knowledge'. (Coach C)

External feedback is also an important element of reflective practice. Coaches also talked about external feedback opportunities through peer coaching, mentor coaching, team coaching or supervision. As one of the supervisors shared:

Supervision is a reflective process [for the coach]. Sitting quietly to think about what they've done, why they've done it, and how they've done it is a struggle for many coaches. Sitting in a dialogue with another helps them do that. (Coach W)

According to the coaches, these activities help the coach to ground or centre themselves, to learn to be present in the moment, and to clear their mind. Reflective practice was seen as a way to deepen consciousness of the inner self along with external others. Engaging in reflective practice helped coaches to be fully available for their client and to foster a quality relationship with their client. Reflective practice is 'all the inner work that helps create a great deal of resilience' in coaching and in life (Coach B).

Most of the coaching supervisors identified reflection or awareness as the skill that coaches were lacking the most. While a coach creates a safe space for their client to engage in a reflective practice, coaches need to be intentional in giving space to themselves for their own reflective practice. In their supervising experiences, coaching supervisors have observed coaches who have been triggered in a session and not been able to control their emotions or behaviour because they have not become fully aware

of what triggers them. As one supervisor pointed out, 'Where does the coach go to take their own "stuff"?' (Coach T).

As another supervisor observed, many new coaches 'do not always either have the time or the muscle built for reflexivity. It's almost like it's a new skill to some of them' (Coach 2). A supervisor is an important professional development tool that can help a coach 'awaken their own internal supervisor' as one of the supervisors said. Many of the coaches have worked with a supervisor in the past, currently work with one, or plan to.

Deepening coaching presence

'Presence is the state that allows us to be the most resourceful, resilient and self-generative person we can be, and that this is, in fact, part of the promise of coaching.' (Doug Silsbee)

Presence is an ICF competency and has been discussed throughout the coaching literature (Hargrove, 2008; Harvey, 2015; Wasylyshyn, 2014), so this finding was not a surprise among the ICF-credentialed coaches. However, the presence theme also surfaced among non-ICF coaches and supervisors. This finding can also be attributed to the field of psychology's influence from Carl Roger's notion of a way of being. Research on expertise has also indicated the significance of presence for learning processes and performance (Waitzkin, 2008). Presence has been studied as a significant factor in quality relationships in psychotherapeutic (Colosimo & Pos, 2015; Geller et al., 2010) and executive leadership (Dagley & Gaskin, 2014; Macaux, 2014) settings.

Why was developing presence so important among the coaches? Coaches viewed presence as a significant part of the relationship, again in line with the coaching literature. Participants believed that coach and supervisor are instruments of work through their presence. As one coach put it, professional development is about 'changing how we show up and deepening how we show up, so that our presence and our capacity to hold the space for others is more powerful' (Coach 2).

When reflecting on their professional development journey coaches referred to a shift in their coaching presence. Presence was described as the authentic self that tended to hide in the beginning of a coach's journey. In the beginning, their being was contrived because their presence was centred on themselves. As coaches deepened their belief in the process and the client, their presence became more client-centred. Coaches described their client-centred presence as:

'I just listen.' (Coach F)

'I monitor my own reactions; I make sure there are no voices distorting my mind.' (Coach I)

'I show up with a zen mind...I tune in to the person and pick up on the subtle things. Like I can smell the pheromones of the other person or sense when they are sweating or when their heart is beating faster.' (Coach I)

How do these coaches enhance their presence? Through life experiences, for one. Presence became a way of being in the everyday – inside and outside coaching sessions. For many coaches, life experiences were viewed as learning opportunities connected to their presence. They have used their everyday life experiences, such as going to a yoga class for personal interest, as a presence practice. They are out there observing. One coach described this continuous learning through life experiences as doing ethnography. By observing the everyday, the right now moment, they are seeing presence through a different lens. As one expert coach said:

Every day is a training ground for how I'm being present and what I'm being present to and how that affects my questions, my listening, what I say to people, what I don't say. (Coach E)

Taking care of self

Many coaches talked about the importance of taking care of one's self in order to stay fit for purpose. Taking care of one's self was

viewed as a way to ensure the coach was at their best, and in turn, fully present for their client. From this perspective, a coach needs to stay in shape to help other people stay in shape, be that mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

Coaches identified various forms of self-care to stay fit, figuratively and literally. Physical exercise and meditation were the most popular activities among coaches. Getting out into nature was also mentioned by some of the coaches. Many coaches have done counselling or psychotherapy as part of their self-care. As one supervisor stressed:

The value and importance of non-coaching personal and professional development for coaches [is key], such as regular exercise, tai chi, meditation, yoga (for physical, mental, spiritual well-being), psychotherapy, group process experience (for emotional wellbeing and support). (Coach W)

Self-care requires time. Many coaches intentionally and routinely set aside time for taking care of self. One coach talked about how he protects his self-care time by putting it on his schedule because he knows it will help him be at his best and be able to give his entire self to his clients for the rest of the day. Other coaches talked about managing their calendar of appointments as a way to coach when they are at their best.

Supervisors also talked about the importance of self-care when it comes to being an effective coach. Self-care was considered as a way to regenerate the mind, body and spirit. This represents the coaching perspective that a coach is an instrument of practice (Bachkirova, 2016), so if the mind, body and spirit are depleted or out of tune with the self then the coach as instrument will not be able to deliver a full presence to the client. By engaging in professional development activities, such as reflective practice and self-care, a coach is able to sharpen all their senses in order to tune into the energy vibrations of the client:

Table 1: Novice to expert-level coaching journey spectrum

Practice of coaching	Novice	Expert
Learning mindset	Performance-based	Learning-based
Education and training	Credential focused	Continuous focused
Development	Skills, theory, knowledge	Mind, body, spirit, theory, knowledge
Confidence	Hesitant	Purposeful
Style	Fixed	Tailored
Knowledge and techniques application	Model rigidity	Model fluidity
Focus	Coach-centered	Client-centered
Self-awareness	Low	High
Vulnerability	Masked grandiosity	Humility
Being/presence	Contrived	Authentic
Trust in process and relationship	Shallow	Deep
Relationship	Rigid	Fluid

This means as coach ‘I am an instrument’ where I am available to the client’s intensity, intentionality, emotionality, tones, etc. (Coach B)

Taken together, the themes represent how the professional development of coaches is an active, dynamic, and emergent process. Table 1 provides a summary of many aspects of coaching and how these aspects might show up in coaching sessions for novice and expert-level coaches.

Conclusion

The descriptions offered by the participants in this study show that professional development is a way to broaden a coach’s perspective. A journey of practice that involves lifelong learning, modelling the way, and deepening belief in the process is one part of professional development for coaches. A reflective practice that involves deepening presence and taking care of self is another part of staying fit for purpose.

A challenge for curriculum developers is to offer a diverse array of opportunities

for coach development that meet the needs of coaches at various levels of involvement and skill. This research provides some insight into the various ways coaches have stayed fit for purpose along their coaching journey. The findings indicate patterns in professional development that have been the most effective for participants. Future research can investigate the relationship between professional development activities and coaching outcomes (i.e. are those coaches who engage in reflective practice more effective than coaches who do not include this approach into their development?).

Development strategies for coaches

Based on the findings, coaches should consider engaging in five key development strategies for continuous learning: a robust reflective practice, external feedback, learning network, field contribution and experimentation.

Develop robust reflective practice:

- Find space and time.
- Do breathing, meditation and mindfulness practices.
- Keep a journal and review recordings of sessions.

Seek out external feedback:

- Find the right mentor, peer or supervisor.
- Ask clients what has been achieved, what worked, and what did not work.

Build a learning network:

- Connect virtually.
- Follow professionals.
- Join groups.

Contribute to the field:

- Be a thought leader in the coaching community.
- Volunteer for a local member association chapter.
- Teach, research, write, develop tools for other coaches.

Experiment in learning:

- Be curious.
- Observe what is happening in the everyday world.
- Try new things and different learning tactics.

Some options to consider for continuous learning include: reading magazines and online articles; analysing and critiquing case studies; subscribing to publications in your areas of interest; listening to podcasts; watching 'TED Talk' videos; connecting to a global network of people using social media, Skype and email; attending training courses and events; and joining an association or group related to your areas of interest.

Evidence suggests that starting new habits and behaviours to create significant changes

is one of deliberate practice that is maintained over time (Nowack & Radecki, 2018). Research also shows that the more experienced and successful people are, the more blind spots or unconscious biases they develop, and the less likely they are to question their practices (Ambrose et al., 2010; Chase & Simon, 1973). This suggests that even advanced-level, expert coaches have something to learn. Professional development (i.e. learning and reflective practice is for everyone).

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is that the findings may not generalise to the majority of coaches since the coach sample was not taken randomly from the population of coaches and consisted of mostly ICF-affiliated coaches. A qualitative study of this kind does not lend itself to generalisability. Instead, a qualitative approach of inquiry with a convenience sample of coaches allowed for greater detail in responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The empirics can be used to generate ideas for future coaching research.

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