Analysis of Links between Opinions on Coaching and Social Intelligence of Management Students

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Abstract

The report presents findings gained by applying a questionnaire for detection of social intelligence - MESI - in the context of evaluating coaching as an education method on management students. Analysis of the acquired data confirmed the essential psychometric parameters of the MESI methodology (which detects factors of manipulation, empathy and social irritability), as well as the questionnaire for assessment of coaching (which detects factors of cognition, competence and social context). The research was conducted on the sample of 267 participants (121 male and 146 female). The correlation analysis of links between the factors of social intelligence and those of coaching assessment confirmed existence of the selected significant interrelations between the social intelligence factor of empathy, cognition indicators and the social context.

Keywords: coaching, social intelligence, MESI methodology

1. Introduction

Implementation of effective coaching techniques is multidimensionally conditioned. It is inevitable to take into consideration the personality traits of the coach and the coachee, conditions under which coaching is implemented, concrete problems to be solved in this process, etc.

The presented study is aimed at the issue of social intelligence as a significant factor related not only to implementation of coaching, but also to evaluation and attitudes towards this method. It describes the issues of coaching and social intelligence and subsequently presents these concepts in an analysis of their mutual interconnections.

1.1 Coaching

Nowadays, the term 'coaching' is becoming a part of professional as well as ordinary communication of people. It is presented with various adjectives as "family coaching", "life coaching", "yoga coaching", or "business coaching", which may evoke an assumption that every area requires a different type of coaching. It is because of this risk of wrong interpretation that the professional organization of coaches (International Coach Federation - ICF, 2009, 2011) usually describes coaching on their websites and promotion materials as a form of client support where the coach helps the client find ways to reach their goals. The overall philosophy of coaching is about helping others identify and define their specific goals and mobilize them to reach these goals.

More than twenty years ago, Sir John Whitmore and Timothy Gallwey for the first time used the basic ideas of coaching in connection to business. The first book on coaching became shortly after its publication recognized widely within the business environment of many world countries. It has been translated into twelve languages which proves that coaching started spreading all over the world (Whitmore, 1992). Other editions of this publication (in years 1996, 2002 and 2009) are a proof that the interest in this area of knowledge keeps growing.

Gallwey (2004) claims that if the coach is able to help remove the inner restraints (or at least lessen their influence), which stop the coachee from achieving a good performance, the coachee improves significantly. He presents coaching as a tool for releasing one's potential which enables the coachee to maximize their performance. In this context he specifies the performance potential and interferences which stop this potential from being exploited in full effect.

According to Downey (2003), the coach is often less experienced in a certain particular area than the coachee.

The coach does not need to provide knowledge, advice or wisdom. What every coach must do is talk, ask questions and act in a way to make others learn and act as best as they can. This author defines coaching as an art, practice, inspiration, energizing, help, achievement, learning and development of the coachee.

From this perspective, among the origins of coaching one can include the thoughts of Rogers (1995) according to whom the successfulness of every interpersonal contact (coaching is merely one of the specific cases) depends not on the knowledge and technical skills, but on the attitudes to which the behavior of the participants in a conversation is connected. It is crucial to accept the fact that the coachee carries their ideas and expectations but also fears of opening their personal area. Every coachee therefore needs some assurance which may be provided by the coaching process only on the basis of empathy, acceptance, congruence and faith (Haberleitner et al., 2009).

In this context, Whitmore (2005) states that the purpose of coaching is to help learn rather than teach. It releases human potential and enables maximization of performance. This may be achieved only if the essential goal of coaching is accomplished, i.e. when the perception of reality is improved and the responsibility of the coachee increased.

In accordance with Covey (2009), coaching leads people to work in compliance with the belief that the quality starts in "me" and "I am" the one who must make decisions.

Following these ideas with an increased emphasis on the subjective dimension of coaching, Wilson (2007) describes it as a process which enables people to find and carry out solutions which are best for their personal purposes. Coaching may also be viewed as a process of human development which includes a structured interaction and use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to achieve the desired and sustainable change for the coachee (Cox, Bachkir, & Clutterbuck, 2010). Gallwey (2000), who is considered to be a pioneer in this area, describes coaching as an art of utilizing conversation to create an environment which would ease the process by which a person moves towards their goals in a fulfilling way.

Shaw and Linnecar (2007) believe that coaching may have a significant effect on the successfulness of an organization as well as performance of individuals. Fleming and Taylor (2004) claim that in the context of work environment, to coach means to help people improve their work performance by the coach using the tasks they ordinarily perform as a study material, and by means of a certain procedure to increase their self-awareness and abilities to solve the given situations.

Coaching introduces better perception of reality, greater independence and responsibility, more effective functioning, better performance and productiveness, ability to set goals and delegate tasks, improvement of inner motivation and engagement, and better flexibility and adaptation to changes (Birknerová, Timková, & Filipová, 2014).

Fleming and Taylor (2004) claim that coaching is the key to creating an open and friendly organization, which is able to appreciate the abilities and ideas of its people and honestly tries to support individuals.

Haberleitner et al. (2009) claim that coaching is applied as an open partnership between the manager and the employees. The goals, interests and needs of both parties must be taken into consideration. Strictly defined conditions are discussed clearly and openly. The potential of all workers is also developed according to their current level of development in order for them to optimize their performance. The strictly defined conditions are discussed clearly and openly. Also the potential of all workers according to their current level of development is developed in order to optimize their performance. This development is based on revealing the potential of workers, mutual elaboration and formulation of goals and tasks, mutual definition of responsibility, methods and points of control, also on the regular exchange of expectations and reciprocal feedback.

The aim of coaching in managerial settings is, according to Cox, Bachkir and Clutterbuck (2010), often to increase performance of the employees by means of education, however, the aim may also be multilateral. Among the employees, it may be represented by better understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses.

As Giertlová (2007) claims, coaching is an efficient form of support of development of managers and employees in order to reach their goals. Coaching in management is an approach which enables managers and employees to apply their abilities and knowledge in full effect. According to Arneson (2013), in the manager-employee relationship framework, coaching is based on five essential attributes:

1. *Where and how was your subordinate brought up?* People like to talk about their childhood or family. Managers can therefore find out more clues about how to lead their employees.

2. *What does the subordinate like?* Managers should focus also on what their subordinates do outside their

working hours.

3. *Who is the most important person for the subordinate?* If managers know the names of these people, the relationship with their subordinates is much more personal and full of trust.

4. *What does the subordinate consider to be interesting or exciting?* Without this information it is difficult to motivate.

5. *What are the life goals of the subordinate?* Many managers would be surprised how much it helps to know the answer to this question. It could help fulfill people's goals and dreams.

Emerson and Loehr (2008) add that coaching is an adequate managerial tool for staff development because it is aimed at awareness and action, that is, two essential building blocks of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is studied and defined also by Sarinnapakorn and Sucaromana (2013) as part of the research of commercial consultants.

Emerson and Loehr (2008) further accentuate that emotional intelligence is the most important indicator of how successful a person can be in their life and work. The authors add that social intelligence represents awareness of own thoughts and feelings, as well as those of others, which leads to an adequate and effective action.

1.2 Social Intelligence

Conceptualization and operationalization of the construct of social intelligence (SI) are still debated in the literature. Related discussions bring the focus of authors to at least seven sets of issues (Birknerová et al., 2013): 1. Setting a nomological network that is agreed upon theoretically; 2. Defining the elements of the social intelligence construct; 3. Pro-social versus anti-social nature of social intelligence in practical life; 4. Personality versus psychometric approach to the measurement of social intelligence; 5. Dispositional versus situational approach to studying social intelligence; 6. Methodologies of studying social intelligence; 7. Research on social intelligence within the cultural context. The definition of social intelligence vis-à-vis similar, related concepts (including emotional intelligence) is discussed herein.

In the 1920s, distinguishing between social and scholastic intelligence, Thorndike (1920) labeled social intelligence as one's capability of understanding and managing others as well as acting wisely in interpersonal relationships. Vernon (1933) followed this idea by stating that social intelligence manifests itself as a general ability to manage people, in socio-technical proficiency, understanding social affairs, readiness to react to stimuli from the social environment, as well as in empathizing with others. Despite long years of social intelligence research, an agreed-upon definition is still elusive (Silvera, Martinussen, & Dahl, 2001). Authors base their definitions on the perceptual, cognitive-analytical and behavioral components of this construct (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 2000) but an approach that will be adopted as an acceptable standard in the field is yet to emerge.

Existing definitions accentuate either the cognitive dimension of this notion, that is, the ability to understand other people (Barnes & Sternberg, 1989), or the behavioral dimension, which refers to adaptive and effective behavior in interpersonal situations (Ford & Tisak, 1983). Usually, both social intelligence components are addressed by authors, however, the difference lies in the degree of accentuation of either the cognitive or the behavioral component.

The focus on the cognitive context of social intelligence is based on the fact that a person effectively regulates their behavior in relation to other people. If there is enough information about these people, this person is able to remember and interpret this information, understands thinking of others and based on this also direct the social interaction with them. From the viewpoint of this cognitive context, Silvera, Martinussen and Dahl (2001) state that as for the structure of the social intelligence construct, it is possible to specify the perceptibility for inner conditions and frames of mind of others, common ability to deal with others, recognition of the social life and its norms, ability to find one's way through social situations, use of the social tactics to manipulate the behavior of others, social attractiveness and social adaptation.

From the perspective of the cognitive approach to social intelligence, Kosmitzki and John (1993) highlight similar aspects of this construct. They specify these aspects as perception of moods and mental conditions of others (perceptibility for inner conditions and frames of mind of others in the former classification), general ability to get along with others (former classification: common ability to deal with others), recognition of social norms (formerly: recognition of the social life and its norms), perceptiveness and comprehension of the complex social situations (formerly: ability to find one's way through social situations), use of social techniques for manipulation of others (formerly: use of the social tactics to manipulate the behavior of others), adopting the perspectives of other people, social adaptation.

The ethical aspect of social intelligence is under-explored in the current literature. "Socially intelligent behavior" goes usually hand in hand with the moral, pro-social, and ethical behavior. Kosmitzki and John (1993), followed by Kaukiainen et al. (1999) put forward a suggestion that social intelligence is a skill and not necessarily a predisposition to comply with social norms, and that amongst its components one will also find the use of interpersonal manipulation of other people, thus it is a construct which it is possible to use both in the socially desirable and the socially undesirable sense.

In accordance with Goleman (1998), social intelligence is essential for leaders, coaches and tutors. Bar-On (2006) describes it as a set of social skills which influence how one understands people and deals with everyday challenges. That is why it plays an important role in the process of coaching. An effective leader or manager is often envisioned in the literature as socially and emotionally skilled and capable of self-management as well as managing others (Štefko & Butoracová Šindleryová, 2008; Várkoly, Sláviková, Lajčin, & Tej, 2012). In this sense, Goleman (1998) and Chen (2008) accentuate the significance of empathy.

1.3 Research Hypotheses

The main objective of this research was to find out whether there exist significant correlations between social intelligence and the opinions of management students on coaching as a method of pre-gradual education. On the basis of the stated objective a hypothesis was formulated: *We assume there exist significant correlations between the selected factors of social intelligence and the opinions of management students on coaching.*

2. Method

An original methodology for evaluation of coaching as an education method was applied in the research. The individual questionnaire items were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 - absolutely no, 5 - absolutely yes). Item examples:

- "Knowledge about coaching enables understanding of human behavior."

- "Coaching belongs to the basic methods of development of managerial competences."

- "Thanks to acquisition of knowledge in the area of coaching, managers are better at motivating people."

In this research, the MESI methodology was also utilized (Frankovský & Birknerová, 2014). In the given methodology, participants respond to 21 items. Each of these items is evaluated on a 5-point scale, where 0 represents "never" and 4 means "very often".

2.1 Research Participants

The research sample consisted of university students in their second year of studies at the Faculty of Management, University of Prešov, Slovakia. The total number of respondents was 267, 121 of which were men and 146 were women.

2.2 Statistical Tools

Data gained from this research were processed by SPSS 20.0 for Windows (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). To assess normality of data distribution, the values of Skewness and Kurtosis were used. Based on these calculations we confirmed normal data distribution.

3. Results

3.1 Extraction of Factors of Coaching

Based on the factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation), the applied questionnaire enables identification of three factors (Figure 1) by means of which this form of coaching is evaluated:

- Cognitions - findings and knowledge about coaching, education process, information about coaching.

- Competences - effectiveness and performance of managerial work, support of other managerial competences.

- Social context - invasion of privacy of people, special preparation of coaches, motivation of employees.

The extracted factors explain 40.3% of variance. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculation was used to detect the internal consistency of the individual factors as a reliability indicator of individual methodology factors. Coefficients of the Cronbach's alpha viability for each subscale of our sample are presented in Table 1. As the detected values of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient illustrate, the internal consistency of the items saturating the specified factors is in the range of acceptability.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for individual subscales

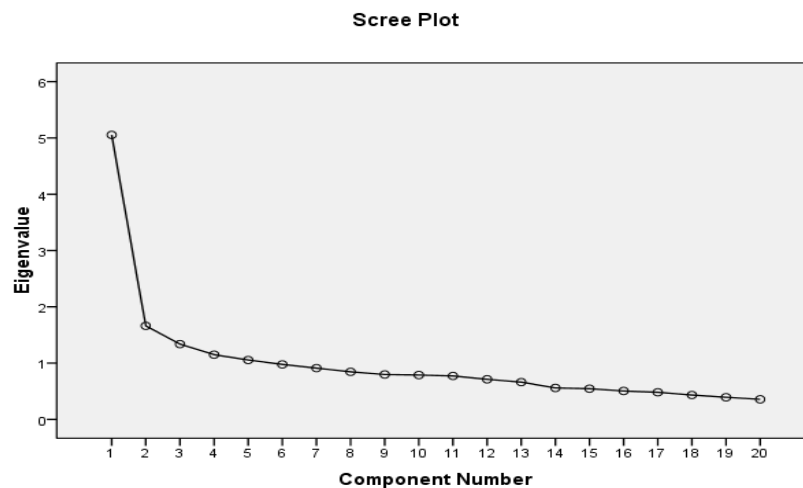|	Cognitions	Competences	Social context
Cronbach's alpha	.822	.705	.602

Figure 1. Illustration of factors by a scree plot

3.2 Data Analysis of Coaching and Social Intelligence

An analysis of links between the social intelligence attributes and evaluation of coaching was preceded by verification of the MESI methodology on a research sample of Management students. Results of this analysis confirmed the findings acquired from the sample of managers (Frankovský & Birknerová, 2014). In this case, again, 3 factors of social intelligence (manipulation, empathy, social irritability) were extracted. These social intelligence factors are specified in detail by means of the MESI methodology by Frankovský and Birknerová (2014).

Not only the factor structure, but also reliability of the separate extracted social intelligence factors (Table 2) calculated on the basis of the data gained from the Management students corresponded with the indicators acquired from the research sample of managers (Frankovský & Birknerová, 2014).

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the MESI subscales

	Manipulation	Empathy	Social irritability
Cronbach's alpha	.882	.795	.701

Mutual correlations between the factors of the original methodology for evaluation of coaching are illustrated by Table 3. The values of correlation coefficients confirm the high degree of correlations between these factors.

Table 3. Mutual correlations between the factors of the methodology for evaluation of coaching

	Social context	Cognitions
Competences		.645**
Social context	.430**	.401**

**p<0.01

Mutual correlations between the factors of the MESI methodology for evaluation of social intelligence were analyzed by Frankovský and Birknerová (2014). In this case the values of correlation coefficients also confirm the high degree of correlations between these individual social intelligence attributes, whereas Manipulation

correlated positively with Empathy. Contrarily, Social irritability correlated positively with Manipulation, but negatively with Empathy.

Following the calculation of correlation coefficients between the factors of the methodology for evaluation of coaching is an analysis of the differences in evaluation of the individual factors of this methodology (Table 4). This analysis confirmed the statistically significant differences in assessment of the individual indicators of coaching evaluation. Cognitions were assessed as most positive. Social context was assessed as least positive. It is crucial to accentuate the fact that all the factors were evaluated positively and that the identified differences are only in the degree of positive evaluation of these factors.

Table 4. Differences in evaluation of the individual factors of the methodology for evaluation of coaching

	Cognitions	Competences	Social context
Median		3.857	3.666
Friedman	4.000	112.5	
Signification		0.000	

We assumed there would exist significant correlations between the selected social intelligence factors and evaluation of coaching as an education method. Analysis of the data confirmed statistically significant positive correlations between the social intelligence factor Empathy and the coaching factors Cognitions and Social context (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlation coefficients between empathy and cognitions, empathy and social context

	Cognitions	Social context
Empathy	0.261**	0.237**

**$p<0.01$

Respondents who scored higher in the factor Empathy are able to detect intentions, feelings and weaknesses of others and guess their wishes, and simultaneously they had higher scores in the coaching factors Cognitions and Social context. It means that they perceive coaching as a contribution to personal development, a way of increasing effectiveness of managerial work, increasing the level of knowing and understanding people, as well as increasing the level of effectiveness of managing interpersonal relationships.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Nowadays, coaching represents a modern method of development of the potential of individuals. Although it is possible to use coaching to solve any problem in any area of life, it is most frequently encountered in the work environment. Greene and Grant (2003) claim that a manager-coach improves communication among employees, increases performance, and decreases fluctuation.

It is therefore appropriate for managers to know how to coach as coaching brings benefits to the staff, which further leads to benefits for the organization itself. Although it is believed that mastering the coaching skills is easily possible even after years of managerial practice, it is very likely that the most ideal time to acquire these skills is already during the university studies. For this reason we decided to study the opinions on coaching of students of the Faculty of Management.

Implementation of coaching is connected to various factors which need to be respected. On a high generalization degree, among these factors one may include personality traits of the coach and situational conditions of realization of this process. The authors of the presented study paid attention to the social intelligence attributes as one of the aforementioned factors. The selection of this factor was not random but based on an assumption that coaching is a process part of which is represented by the social context.

It was therefore assumed that there would exist significant correlations between the selected factors of social intelligence and the opinions on coaching as an education method. From the perspective of the studied links between the social intelligence factors and the method of coaching, a significant correlation was found only in the area of empathy. Existence of a positive correlation between Empathy and Cognitions, and Empathy and Social context, was detected.

Our findings highlight the fact that more empathetic individuals regard coaching as more beneficial than those who have lower scores in Empathy. Adequacy and effectiveness of coaching methods is therefore closely related to the level of empathy abilities. When coaching, either as part of education or guidance, it is inevitable to accept also the level of development of empathy abilities of people. If this level was not taken into consideration, not only an ineffective application of coaching procedures, but also their rejection or negative influence on a person could occur.

From this perspective, the aforementioned topics are highly contemporary and deserve greater attention of authors. There are researchers, such as Boyatzis, Good and Massa (2012), who describe the links between social intelligence and leadership performance. Others, for example de Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011), study interconnections between coaching and management effectiveness. Coaching, coaching styles and effectiveness of coaching are central topics also in the work of Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen (2014) or Hui, Sue-Chan and Wood (2013). Nevertheless, it would be beneficial if these particular areas of interest were studied more and in greater depth. That is why we plan to focus on the presented issues also in our future research and thus contribute with further findings to these particular fields of knowledge.

Acknowledgments

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