

de Haan, E., & Nilsson, V. O. (2017). Evaluating coaching behavior in managers, consultants, and coaches: A model, questionnaire, and initial findings. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 69(4), 315.

Executive coaches have access to a potentially huge number of possible coaching interventions that can each be used to facilitate 'best practice.' Conversely, our coachees have a similarly large number of potential responses that they could evoke in response to these interventions. As a result, there has been a lack of evidential clarity in the coaching literature surrounding what might be termed "best behavior" on the part of the coach; what are the best interventions to use, and when are the ideal opportunities to use them. In an ideal world, we would be able to use a basic model of coaching interventions so that we can reliably measure which ones work the best in given situations, and so that our coachees can recognize the purpose and validity of such interventions. Given that we don't live in an ideal world, and that coaching engagements are often complex affairs, trying to establish such a model is probably an incredibly difficult task.

Erik de Haan and Viktor O. Nilsson from the Ashridge Business School in England recently proposed a model of coaching behaviors that might be used to close the conceptual gap in this respect, by refining and testing a version of the Coaching Behaviors Questionnaire on 537 coaches, 196 consultants, 559 manager-coaches and 221 coachees. The authors were seeking to establish whether self-reported behavior profiles among coaches would change based on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, job description and nationality. Additionally, the authors wanted to determine whether there were differences between the behavioral profiles of a coach as reported by their coachees, and as self-reported by the coach themselves.

The resulting model that the authors created showed that coaching is ultimately based on three directive sets of behaviors on the part of the coach themselves (prescribing, informing and confronting) and on the part of their interaction with the coachee (exploring, supporting and releasing). Taken together, the model shows that coaches have a broad range of interventions at their disposal: passive listening; directly offering advice or suggestions; issuing challenges or calls to action; providing warm and support; probing more deeply into the mindset of coachees; inviting the coachee to explore their own mindset and articulate this accordingly, etc. Likewise, each possible intervention can have a range of different effects on the coachee and the coaching conversation, which emphasizes the necessity, on the part of the coach, of striking a balance between direction and facilitation, and of being able to seamlessly transition from one intervention to another as the specific coaching engagement requires.

Some of the findings from the study also showed that there are differences between coaches' perceptions of their own behavior and those of their coachees, as well as differences among coaches in different demographic groups. Female coaches were found to rank themselves higher on non-directive coaching interventions than male coaches. Older coaches were perceived to be less effective on directive interventions than their younger counterparts, and were ranked lower in providing active support. Job role also played a part here, with those who self-identified as "coaches" being more likely to possess a discrepancy between what they perceived to be their use of particular coaching behaviors and how their actual coachees viewed such behaviors. Indeed, coachees working with those who identified as coaches scored their coaches significantly lower on non-directive interventions than the coaches themselves, indicating that coaches may be unwittingly prescribing to their coachees than they think. The authors note that they cannot be sure whether any of this relates to skill on the part of coaches, but admonish that it may reflect an absence of appropriate emotional attunement on the part of the coach, such that the coach is so busy with their own ideas that they do not pay enough attention to the coachee's emotional processes.