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The Application of the the 3+1Cs Relationship Model in Executive Coaching

Executive coaching is an intervention that organizations often use to enhance managers' opportunities, develop skills, promote knowledge and reflectivity, as well as improve overall performance. An effective working relationship has been considered a necessary condition for the success of executive coaching. Thus, the present study aimed to explore the coaching relationship formulated among five coach– coachee dyads using the 3+1Cs (closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation) relationship model. Qualitative data obtained via semistructured interviews were content analyzed. Analysis revealed the importance of closeness as defined in terms of mutual trust and respect, commitment in terms of developing a partnership that is thought to be close and lasting, as well as willing and motivating, and complementarity in terms of working well together while understanding the specific roles each has to take. Moreover, the analysis highlighted that open channels of communication forged a degree of feeling and being cooriented in terms of viewing the relationship and the broader issues associated with it. The findings highlighted the central role of the coaching relationship while its quality and nature was effectively discerned using the 3+1Cs model.

Keywords: executive coaching, coaching relationship, 3+1Cs model, relational qualities

Managers within an organization take a variety of roles that span from leadership and management, innovation and planning, as well as technical and administrative roles whereby the expectation is the effective allocation and utilization of resources, to health-related roles whereby the expectation is the promotion of physical health and wellbeing of employees. These diverse roles and associated responsibilities position managers at the heart of organizations as instrumental entities in the formulation of norms, values, and attitudes among its employees. Given their central position within the business world, there is a growing interest and investment in developing managers who understand the organization they work in, the people that they work with, and their personal capabilities in an attempt to create a working climate that is constructively productive and healthy.

Executive coaching was borne as a medium that can provide the necessary support to further advance managers' capabilities for the benefit of the organization.

Executive coaching as an organizational medium has grown substantially with an estimated market price of US\$2 billion (Fillery & Lane, 2006). In the United Kingdom, 88% of organizations are using executive coaches (Jarvis, Lane, & Fillery-Travis, 2005), and in the United States the figures are similarly high with 93% of U.S.-based global companies adopting executive coaching (Bono, Purnanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009). According to the International Coaching Federation (ICF), the largest worldwide body for professional coaches, its membership has increased from 1,500 in 1999 to more than 10,000 members in 2006 across 80 countries (ICF, 2010). These developments have been accompanied with empirical evidence that highlight the positive effects of executive coaching on workplace stress (Foster & Lendl, 1996), performance (Rich, 1998; Tobias, 1996), problem resolution (Berry, Ashby, Gnika, & Matheny, 2011), and skill transfer (Olivero, Bane, & Kopelman, 1997), just to name a few.

Despite the noticeable growth of executive coaching over the past decade with ever-growing evidence of its efficacy (see Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh, & Parker, 2010), theoretically driven research remains limited (Passmore, 2010). With that in mind, the present study aimed to explore and understand an active ingredient of the process for successful executive coaching (Joo, 2005; Jowett, O'Broin, & Palmer, 2010), namely, the coach-coachee relationship as it specifically emerges in organizations, using one-to-one interviews. This study was guided by a well-researched model from the field of sport coaching known as the 3+1Cs model where the "Cs" stand for closeness, commitment, complementarity plus co-orientation (Jowett, 2007). Although coaching unfolds in diverse contexts including sport and business (Jowett et al., 2010), its main focus revolves around supplying direction, instruction, supervision, monitoring, and training in an effort to facilitate professional development including learning and performance (Downey, 1999). There are numerous definitions of coaching (see, e.g., Kilburg, 1996; Whitmore, 2009), however for the purpose of this study coaching is referred to as the practice and process of expressing needs or weaknesses such as lack of confidence or need for improving assertiveness, time management) and of fulfilling desires and goals such as improving confidence and performance. This definition cuts

across many conceptual definitions cited in the literature, and more importantly underlines the centrality of the relationship developed between coaches and coachees. Ultimately, this relationship can potentially increase the chances for the success of the process of executive coaching because it can become a key process through which the coachee can freely express weaknesses and can uninhibitedly work hard to fulfill identified goals (cf. [Jowett, 2005](#)).

The Coaching Relationship in Executive Coaching

The coach– coachee relationship is viewed as a fundamental part of a successful coaching process (e.g., [de Haan, 2008a, 2008b](#); [Duckworth & de Haan, 2009](#); [Joo, 2005](#); [Palmer & Mc Dowall, 2010](#); [Passmore, 2010](#)) and as a prerequisite for the effectiveness of coaching practice ([Kampa & White, 2002](#); [Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001](#); [Kilburg, 2001](#); [Lowman, 2005](#)). In fact, the coaching relationship has been viewed as one of a three key processes in a conceptual framework for successful executive coaching. [Joo \(2005\)](#), to help further understand executive coaching and to guide future research, proposed *antecedents* such as coach and coachee's characteristics, as well as organizational support, *processes* such as coaching approach, coaching relationship, as well as feedback receptivity, and *outcomes* both proximal (self-awareness, learning) and distal (individual, organizational success). While [Joo \(2005\)](#) emphasized that a good relationship between a coach and a coachee is a critical factor for behavioral change that can ultimately lead to coachee's individual success and organizational success more broadly, it is not the only condition for successful outcomes. In a meta-analytic review concerning the therapeutic relationship and psychotherapy outcomes, Lambert and Barley (2001) found that the relationship developed between a helper and a client accounts for 30% of the variance in diverse outcomes with the 40% of the variance attributed to external factors, 15% to expectancy effects, and 15% to specific therapy techniques. Thus, they concluded that psychotherapy outcomes may be improved if psychotherapists learned to relate to clients and possessed the capacity to tailor the relationship to the individual client.

Although research revolving around the relationship developed and maintained between the coach and the coachee is limited, it has supplied useful information. For example, [McGovern et al. \(2001\)](#) reported that 84% of coaches identified the quality of the relationship with their coach as fundamental for the success of coaching. [Digman \(2004\)](#) revealed that the

quality of the coaching relationship was positively related to higher levels of coachees' self-efficacy. In a more recent study, [Baron and Morin \(2009\)](#) found that the coach– coachee relationship was associated with the coach's self-efficacy in terms of promoting learning and coachee's motivation to learn. Correspondingly, [Berry and colleagues \(2011\)](#) revealed that the coach– coachee relationship was associated with coachees' change and that the relationship mediates the link between the number of coaching sessions and the coachee's self-efficacy. Collectively, the findings of this research suggest that the relationship quality matters because it is linked to important correlates.

There have been recent attempts to conceptually understand the nature and quality of the coach–coachee relationship (e.g., [O'Broin & Palmer, 2007](#)). These conceptual attempts have been mainly based on [Bordin's \(1979\)](#) working alliance model, whereas the majority of studies mentioned earlier have used this model to assess the quality of the relationship (e.g., [Baron & Morin, 2009](#); [Duckworth & De Haan, 2009](#)). This model was originally developed to assess the alliance or bond between consultants and clients mainly in therapeutic contexts. Bordin identified three basic features contained within the working alliance or relationship: (a) mutual agreement about the *goals* and the desired outcomes, (b) mutual agreement on the *tasks* and the roles required from both members to reach those goals, and (c) mutual *bonds* reflected in empathy and respect. Based on the main principles of the working alliance model, [O'Broin and Palmer \(2007, 2009\)](#) modified it to better suit the context of the coach– coachee relationship within executive coaching. Although the modified working/coaching alliance model may have the capacity to describe the content and functions of the coaching alliance relatively well, it has yet to attract consistent research within the field of executive coaching psychology. One plausible reason is that the working/coaching alliance model is primarily focused on the role of the coachee in making decisions and negotiating goals and tasks, and thus it somewhat fails to capture the relationship as a whole whereby affective, cognitive, and behavioral bonds are equally considered within a bidirectional (give-and-take) system.

The 3+1Cs Model of Two-Person Relationships

In this study, we propose the application of the 3+1Cs model of two-person relationships ([Jowett, 2007](#)) as an alternative framework in evaluating the core dimensions of the quality of the relationship established between the coach and the coachee. The model was initially applied and tested in sport coaching settings and in the coach–athlete relationship more specifically. Nonetheless,

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Jowett and colleagues (2010) have highlighted that the dimensions of the quality of dyadic relationships may be comparable in whatever context individuals operate. Within that model, the relationship two people develop is viewed as a social *situation* within which their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors are *interdependent* (see Jowett, 2007). This definition of relationship implies that the relationship developed between a coach and a coachee is transient and reciprocal at affective, cognitive, and behavioral levels. Subsequently, how one feels influences how the other thinks, and how one behaves influences how the other feels and thinks and so on.

Based on the definition of two-person relationships, relationship members' feelings, thoughts, and behaviors have been operationalized through the constructs of Closeness, Commitment, and Complementarity, respectively, collectively known as the 3Cs (see Jowett, 2005, 2007, 2009). Closeness describes the level and degree of affective connectedness that develops among the members of the relationship. It includes qualities such as trust, respect, appreciation, and liking among others. Commitment reflects both members' intention to remain in a close relationship that lasts over time. It refers to the long-term orientation toward the bond or connection. Complementarity reflects members' reciprocal and corresponding cooperation. On one hand, corresponding cooperation is reflected in interactions that are similar in type and intensity such as being mutually friendly, responsive, and relaxed. On the other hand, reciprocal cooperation is reflected in interactions that are different in type but similar in intensity such as when a coach provides feedback or leads the proceedings and a coachee accepts or is open to the feedback given (see Yang & Jowett, 2010).

Co-orientation is the "+1Cs" of the model and reflects the interdependence of members' closeness, commitment, and complementarity (3Cs) or the conceptual consensus as this pertains to how members view their relationship in terms of the 3Cs (Jowett, 2005, 2007). In sport, Jowett and her colleagues combined Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity, and Co-orientation into a single model in an effort to examine (a) whether these constructs reflect coaches and athletes' reality of the relationship (see, e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Jowett & Frost, 2007) and (b) whether the constructs associate with important variables such as performance and satisfaction (Jowett & Nezelek, 2012), empathic accuracy (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004), collective efficacy (Jowett, Shanmugam, & Caccoulis, 2012), motivation (Adie & Jowett, 2010), passion (Lafrenière et al., 2008), interpersonal conflict, and social support (Jowett, 2009).

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The Present Study

Both the coaching alliance and the 3+1Cs relationship quality model underline the ties that bond members of dyadic relationships. From an operational point of view, both models evidently highlight the affective ties through the concepts of Closeness and Bond, respectively. Although the affective ties via the constructs of Closeness and Bond are quite clear to discern in both models, the other constructs contained in these models are more difficult to discern, highlighting their potential conceptual and operational differences. For example, Commitment is not directly assessed through the working/coaching alliance model. This may be because the coach–coachee relationship can be short with infrequent contact. It is also worth noting that the coach–athlete relationship, like the coach–coachee and other such relationships, can also be short. Nonetheless, irrespective of the length of relationships, members are more likely to invest time and energy if they believe there is “future” in the relationship or a sense of benefit if invested in them. In fact, there is research in the executive coaching literature to suggest that the quality of the coach–coachee relationship is associated with the number of coaching sessions received (Baron & Morin, 2009), reflecting the investment element associated with the construct of commitment. Complementarity assesses the level of cooperation between relationship members, and although the working/coaching alliance does not directly assess complementarity, its constructs of Task and Goal would suggest that it indirectly at least could reflect the degree to which relationship members cooperate. Task and Goal instead reflect the manner to which the coach and the coachee understand and agree on what needs to be done. This element may be more in line with an aspect of Co-orientation, which deals with perceptual consensus or the common ground established between the coach and the coachee albeit relative to the 3Cs. Thus, such aspects as agreement of goals and tasks do not feature in the 3+1Cs model as they do in the working/coaching alliance model. This may be one important difference between the two models.

The 3+1Cs model assumes that the quality of the relationship is likely to determine how relationship members work, and thus it does not place emphasis on the understanding and agreeing of the various goals and tasks. It is assumed that dyad members who have developed a good quality relationship are likely to understand and agree on how and what needs to be done to bring about change. This assumption resonates with Carl Rogers' (1961) work on developing helping, genuine, and effective therapist-client relationships that allow clients to use for growth, change, personal development, and optimal functioning. It is speculated here that the working/coaching alliance may be more suited to counseling (as was originally intended), with its focus on

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self-awareness (reflect, contemplate, address issues), whereas focusing on the core of the quality of the relationship may be more suited to consulting, with its focus on learning (learn and apply new skills). Quality relationships have been thought to draw people into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn and become successful (cf. Jowett, 2005; Rogers, 1961).

The coach–coachee relationship is widely recognized, but explicit theoretical conceptions of that relationship are evidently rare in the executive coaching literature. Thus, the main aim of this study was to understand the nature and quality of the dyadic relationship developed between the coach and the coachee in executive coaching. The significance of this study lies in importing the 3+1Cs relationship model while refining and explicating it with grounded and inductive research to identify the specific components of the major constructs as applied in the context of executive coaching.

Method

Participants

A total of 10 participants, five coach–coachee dyads, from the United Kingdom volunteered to participate in the study. At the time of the study, participants were in a coaching relationship for at least six months, and thus had a relational history that allowed them to reflect on their current experiences especially as these pertain to nature and quality of the coach–coachee relationship. There were one male and four female coaches, all of whom trained in psychology, along with three female and two male coachees, all of whom worked in medium-scale organizations. The dyadic composition was as follows: two female coach–coachee partnerships, two female coach–male coachee partnerships, and one male coach–female coachee partnership. The coachees were assigned to coaches by the company or organization. Coaches' mean age was 55.6 years old with an average of 9.6 years of experience in executive coaching. The coaches interviewed were trained in psychology and coaching. Coachees' mean age was 40.6 years old with an average of 1.38 years as coaching clients.

Instrumentation

For the purpose of this study a semistructured interview¹ was used as the main method of data collection. Telephone interviews were conducted to eliminate travel time and costs. Although telephone interviews are thought to lack nonverbal communication and visual cues, telephone interview data have not been found to be significantly different from face-to-face interview data (Sweet, 2002). A semistructured interview was used as a flexible medium

that promotes the development of rapport and provides greater flexibility to the researcher to examine relevant areas of interest while generating insightful data (Hillary & Knight, 1999). Two separate yet corresponding interview schedules were designed: one for the coaches and one for the coachees. The development of the interview was based on an interview schedule that was used in previous similar qualitative studies that examined the nature of the coaching relationship in sport settings (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Frost, 2007). Although these interview schedules and questions were designed for a coach–athlete relationship, in our study the questions were modified accordingly to reflect the relationship type and context within which coaches and coachees operated.

The interview schedule consisted of 28 open-ended questions including prompts. These questions aimed to tease out the quality and quantity to which Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity, and Co-orientation (3+1Cs) was experienced in the relationship. The interview schedule was therefore naturally divided into four sections reflecting the aforementioned constructs. In addition, an introductory section was added asking more general questions (e.g., How would you describe your coaching relationship? What are the functions of the relationship?), including demographic information (e.g., age, gender, length of relationship, and occupation). The second section included questions on Closeness. For example, What interpersonal feelings underline the relationship? In what ways is the partnership trustworthy? How do you respect your coach/coachee? The next section aimed to tease out the content and quality of Commitment. For example, How committed do you feel to your coach/coachee and the relationship? If you had to terminate your relationship, how would

¹ The interview schedule is available from the first author upon request.

you feel or think? Do you feel you have invested enough time and energy in making this relationship effective? The section on Complementarity included such questions as, Can you describe the role that you take in the relationship? How do you receive your coach/coachee's comments, advice, opinions? How easy is to work with your coach/coachee? Finally, the last session included questions on Co-orientation: Within the relationship, how well do you know one another relative to the relationship you have developed and understand its functions? What issues do you commonly discuss with one another? Do you tend to agree with each other's point of view? Each interview concluded by asking the participants whether there were further issues they wanted to raise or discuss.

Procedure

An invitation letter was sent to participants via e-mail explaining the aims and the scope of the study along with details about the interview session. Participants were asked to sign and return a consent form, after which a date and time were arranged for the telephone interview. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio recorded. Data collection commenced once approval from the ethical advisory committee was granted from the first author's institution. The interviews and subsequent analysis of the obtained data and overall procedures were conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society ethical code. To guarantee anonymity while collecting and analyzing the data, letters were used to identify the participants' role as a coach (C) and executive manager (E) and numbers (1–5) were used to distinguish the dyads. Finally, copies of the interview transcriptions were made available to all participants.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data followed procedures similar to those used in previous qualitative studies that applied the 3+1Cs model (e.g., [Jowett & Cockerill, 2003](#); [Jowett & Frost, 2007](#); [Jowett & Meek, 2000](#)). The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and then they were then content analyzed. Content analysis was used as a method of organizing the obtained data in categories that reflected similar content ([Weber, 1990](#)). During the categorization process, a priori categories reflective of the four constructs (Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity, and Co-orientation) were used to classify phrases or words (units of analysis; Raw Data, RD). This strategy of data organization, where the data is simplified and reduced into predetermined categories, helped to better understand how coaches and coachees as a collective viewed the content and quality of their relationships (cf. [Krippendorff, 1980](#)). After the

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initial categorization of the data, a hierarchy of responses was then generated, moving from general levels to more specific levels. This hierarchical organization provided evidence of the complex nature of the constructs under study and helped highlight the breadth and depth of each construct related to the coaching relationship. A frequency analysis in terms of percentage was also applied to quantify the responses the participants had cited within the generic categories (see [Weber, 1990](#)). By analyzing the frequency of responses, the obtained data became easily comprehensible, allowing patterns to emerge and making comparisons between the constructs possible. Associations among the constructs were also considered as they highlighted the interdependent nature of Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity, and Co-orientation; for example, raw data units that contained elements of both Complementarity and Closeness (e.g., “I wasn’t *feeling frustrated* because he was *working hard* on the action plan” [C2]).

Results

The results are discussed in terms of the constructs that they represent: Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity, and Co-orientation. Moreover, associations among the constructs are also discussed. A summary of the content analysis is presented in [Figure 1](#).

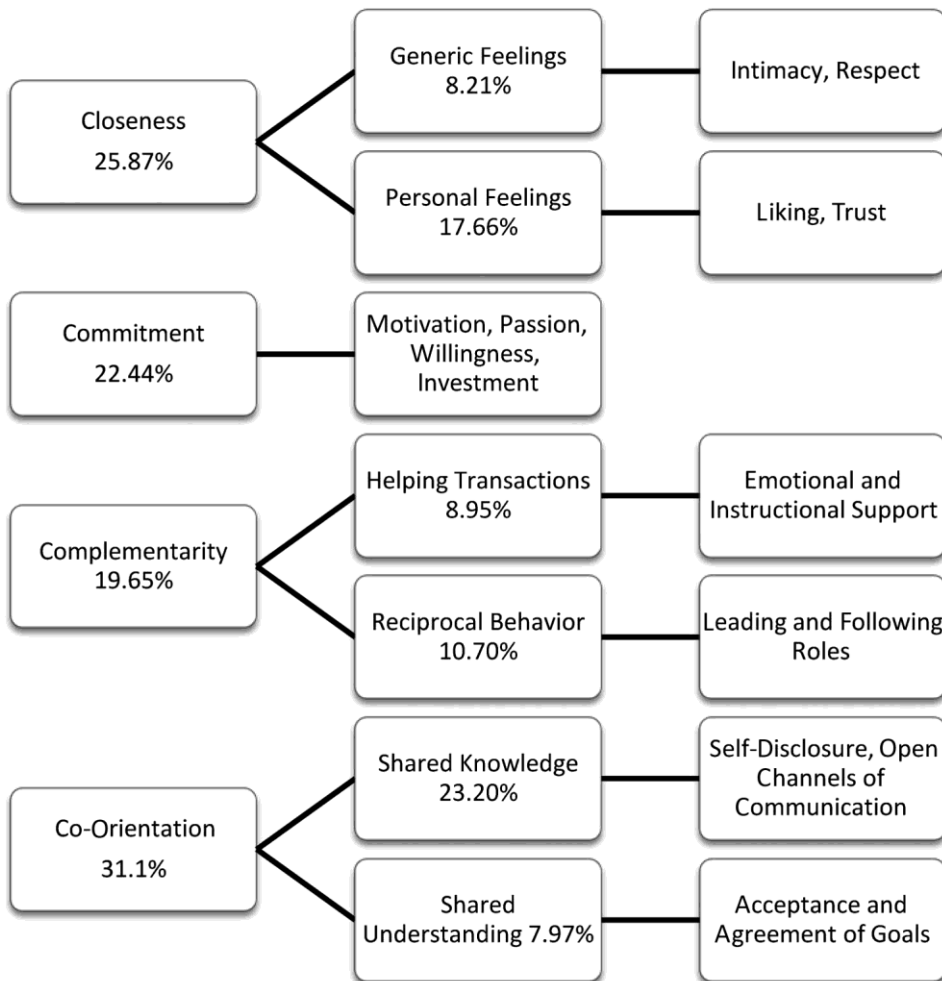


Figure 1. Summary of content analysis.

Closeness

From the responses to closeness-related questions, a total of 104 raw data units (RD = 25.87%) were attributable to the coaching relationship per se. Closeness included positively framed words and phrases or statements, highlighting the emotional bond between the coach and the client. The construct of closeness consisted of 2-s order themes: *personal feelings* and *generic feelings* that were cited by both members. The second-order theme of generic feelings included the first-order themes of *intimacy* (feeling close) and *respect* (feeling regard/esteem), accounting for 8.21% of the raw data units (RD = 33) related to the emotional aspect of the relationship. Especially, the feeling of respect toward each other and especially from coaches to their coachees, was prevalent during the interviews (e.g., “I respected most what he was trying to

achieve in his job.” [C2]; “and I think there is a mutual respect and certainly I respect his experience and expertise.” [C4]).

All the participants ($n = 10$) referred to the second-order theme of personal feelings accounting for 17.66% of the closeness-related raw data units and included the first-order themes of *interpersonal liking* and *trust*. Although the coaching relationship is a professional partnership, the existence of these feelings seemed to be key in establishing the kind of emotional bond that is necessary for creating a safe and more personal environment within which the coachee can develop and flourish. Especially, trust was thought by both members of all dyads (RD = 50; 12.44%) as a basic ingredient for the development of the coaching relationship: “The relationship is very much built on trust” (E1); and “Once this (trust) has been achieved and the client feels that I am someone they can turn to and can add value, the relationship deepens.” (C3); “I couldn’t be part of a coaching relationship if I didn’t think it was reliable and trustworthy.” (E4); and “I trust her totally, 100%.” (E1).

Feelings of interpersonal liking were also evident in the relationship (RD = 21; 5.22%). Especially, coaches and coachees appreciated each other’s effort put forth during the coaching sessions. For example: “I like that she is very good in making me feel at ease.” (E4); “He really likes working with me, he really likes to consider alternative views and possibilities, he really likes to try new things that we have discussed.” (C3); and “I like the way he has continuously engaged in the process.” (C4). Moreover, participants showed a positive interest in other person’s character and personality with quotations such as: “She’s fantastic as a person.” (E5); and “I like him as a person as well. He is quite gentle, but also very hardworking . . . and respected what we have been trying to do.” (C2). There were no reported negative aspects of closeness such as, distress, anger, frustration, or isolation.

Commitment

All participants ($n = 10$) emphasized the importance of commitment as a valuable factor for the relationship to be effective in the long run (RD = 100; 22.44%). When coaches talked about commitment, they seemed to highlight their motivation, passion, investment, and willingness to work with one another during and between coaching sessions. On one hand coaches said, “it is all about coachees’ motivation to continuously identify, explore, and work on issues that matter and feel free to talk about these” (C2), and “I think it’s important for the coachee When I worked with people who can’t or won’t engage with the coach or the coaching relationship for the potential benefits that can be reaped in the future is that nothing much happens.” (C4). On the other hand coachees said, “It [commitment] means that once you agree about a

task you go and do it There is a level of work involved that you have to do between the different sessions.” (E2) and “I do think that one of the key elements of successful coach– coachee relationships is actually the coachee attending the sessions fully prepared.” (E4).

Complementarity

A total of 79 raw data units (RD = 19.65%) emerged from coaches’ and coachees’ responses to the questions about complementarity. The responses included statements of interpersonal behaviors that were cooperative. In particular, complementarity consisted of the second-order themes of *helping transaction* (RD = 36; 8.95%) and *reciprocal behavior* (RD = 43; 10.7%). Most of the participants talked about helping transaction, such as *emotional support* (RD = 15; 3.73%) and *instructional support* (RD = 21; 5.22%), both of which formed part of the first-order themes. They felt that these transactions were facilitative of a coaching partnership that can be successful and pleasurable: “I enjoy a coaching relationship where there is an opportunity for the coach to be transformational.” (C2); “I support my coaching clients with information . . . and lots of tasks and exercises they can consider.” (C3); “the client needs to know that I am there to help them develop and progress” (C1). One significant factor that appeared to accompany good cooperation between the coach and the coachee was the roles each member took in the relationship. On one hand, the coaches’ role was more about facilitating and supporting: “My role as a coach is to facilitate change in my client.” (C1) and “I view my role as predominantly supportive; while the coachee may have all the answers and their own inner wisdom, my role is to help coachees access that wisdom appropriately and apply it as deemed necessary.” (C5). On the other hand, the coachees’ role revolved around listening, reflecting, considering, deliberating, and debating as necessary: “I think I have the student role; I am quite keen to hear, to learn from the coach.” (E2) and “being advised; so, as a client I expect to be given advice.” (E3). Both coaches and coachees explained that there was a good understanding of the complementarity or compatibility of roles. For example, coach– coachee dyads reported that coaches’ role to facilitate (e.g., “My role as a coach is to facilitate change in my client Coachees will have to want to change, improve, advance, and progress.”) was often met with a complementary response by the coachee (e.g., “I was leading . . . and the coach was there to facilitate me find the answers within myself.”).

Co-orientation

Thirty-one percent (RD = 121) of the collected data were attributed to co-orientation, including words and phrases that show the common ideas, beliefs, values, and goals of both members. All the participants identified the construct of co-orientation through the second-order themes of *shared knowledge* and *understanding*. *Shared knowledge* accounted for the 23.13% (RD = 93) of the data consisting of the first-order themes of *self-disclosure* (RD = 34; 8.46%) and *discussions* of general and even personal nature that facilitated information exchange (RD = 59; 14.67%). On the other hand, *shared understanding* accounted for the 6.97% (RD = 28) and included the first-order themes of *acceptance* (RD = 21; 5.23%) and *influence* (RD = 7; 1.74%).

Given the nature of the coaching relationship, the most frequently discussed issues, as was expected, revolved around career and business development, as well as leadership effectiveness. Though there were times where nonwork issues naturally crept in during session especially as the length of the relationship increased: “we talk about everything, his home, his family, his work life, his boss, his colleagues, everything.” (C3). Such “nonwork issues” made their appearance as a discussion topic especially when it felt they impeded work issues (e.g., work-life balance aspects): “We would get into things like that, but only if they interfered or if we felt impacted on his job performance.” (C2).

The importance of communication within the coaching process was emphasized: “If you can’t openly communicate then you can’t develop a strong relationship.” (C3). Communication as a dimension of feedback on the part of the coaches was thought instrumental: “I think one of the key strengths of the coach I have is that he is very good at reflecting and by that I mean he is able to reflect on the emotional and informational element of our dialogue.” (E4). A degree of openness is necessary for effective communication and this was evidence in the participants’ responses: “I think for the coaching sessions to work, you have to be honest about all things including personal” (E1) and “They appreciate the fact that I am open about myself” (C4).

Associations Between the 3+1Cs

There were a number of responses that reflected associations among the constructs under study. *Closeness/Co-orientation* was evident in the majority of participants’ responses. For example, they considered trust as a significant determinant of open communication. It appears that coachees especially needed to feel that they can trust their coach in order to speak freely and openly about issues they were concerned (“You trust her to be able to offer

partial view of whatever issues we're discussing." [E3]; "I felt the coachee was able to trust me and therefore helped me to be open in the sessions." [C2]). *Complementarity/Closeness* was evidenced in coaches and coachees' reports where feelings of warmth, respect, and trust appeared to play an important role in promoting cooperative acts of interaction: "I think if we didn't have the trust . . . , the relationship wouldn't be effective in reaching the goals set out." (C2); and "She has been a very warm, friendly, and reliant person and that has helped in working with her through the various tasks." (E5); and "a greater degree of comfort and trust has been developed over time helping us to understand each other's style of interacting." (C2). In fact, this latter quote highlights a three-way association between closeness (e.g., trust), co-orientation (e.g., understanding, being on the same wave-length), and complementarity (e.g., effective cooperation). *Complementarity/Co-orientation* was also evident: "Part of communication is that I encourage them to work differently or consider aspects in their job they never thought before This comes through the way we communicate together." (C2) and "If we share what we think, how we feel, I can bring my expertise and knowledge in ways that makes it part of the options or actions available to them." (C3). Finally, associations between *Commitment/Closeness* and *Commitment/Complementarity* were evident. For example, participants said, "If the coachee believes in what I can possibly offer or he trusts my experience . . . then the relationship is likely to be a successful one . . . to bring about positive change we need time" (C4) and "I am committed because we work well together; it has been useful to my development" (E5). Such associations were evident throughout the transcripts highlighting the interdependent nature of the constructs (3+1Cs) that describe the content and quality of the relationship.

Discussion

Although conceptually the coach– coachee relationship has been considered central to the coaching process and coaching outcomes (e.g., Joo, 2005), only a handful of empirical studies have explored the coach– coachee relationship, and a large proportion of them have focused at the correlates of the relationship (e.g., Baron & Morin, 2009). Thus, the purpose of this study was to specifically focus on the content and quality of the coach– coachee relationship within the executive coaching context employing the 3+1Cs model of two-person relationships (Jowett, 2007). It has been recently postulated that the four constructs of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation (3 + 1Cs) have the capacity to map the quality and content of two-person relationships regardless of their type (Jowett et al., 2010). The findings of this study uncovered relational components of the four constructs as they

manifest in executive coaching relationships. The analysis of the data uncovered that the participants recognized the importance of the relationship as a medium for identifying needs and satisfying goals on one hand, and on the other hand they reported that their relationship contained such important relational components as trust, respect, liking, support, responsiveness, cooperation, and openness. Similar relational components have been found in coaching relationships in sport (e.g., Bloom, Durant-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Frost, 2007; Poczwardowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2000) and in other types of relationships (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Ickes, 1993; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998).

Overall, it appears that trust, respect, liking, support, responsiveness, cooperation, and openness are important relational components of the dyadic coaching relationship but also essential for the success of the coaching process. Joo's (2005) model highlighted that the coaching relationship is part of the coaching process alongside coaching approach (counseling/remedial vs. consulting/developmental) and feedback receptivity (challenging feedback and helpful suggestions). In this study, it was evident that a close, committed, complementary, and cooriented (3+1Cs) relationship may link to both coaching approach and feedback receptivity. A good quality relationship characterized by the 3+1Cs and their corresponding relational components can potentially provide the coach with opportunities to recognize and appreciate the coachee's needs and weaknesses (e.g., What kind of coaching does the coachee need to meet his or her weaknesses? coaching approach), as well as goals (e.g., What kind of feedback does the coachee require to bring about changes? feedback receptivity).

In terms of affective closeness, mutual trust and respect seemed to enhance the quality of the coaching relationship. It would seem that these interpersonal feelings are likely to affect the coaching process by identifying and satisfying goals as these pertain to learning new skills, feeling more accomplished, satisfied, and successful. This finding is consistent with previous studies in interpersonal relationships (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000), suggesting that a degree of trust, respect, liking, and appreciation are important determinants of personal outcomes (e.g., self-confidence, self-concept, skill development, personal success). Trust was mentioned most frequently by both coaches and coachees, especially in association with successful coaching. For coaches, efforts would seem to revolve around gaining their clients' trust to develop a bond that is meaningful. For coachees, trust would seem to enable them to feel safe and confident enough to open up and disclose information about their needs and weaknesses.

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Additionally, a strong sense of respect was evident toward one another's personality and career achievements. It was highlighted that respect was important especially during the initial stages of the coaching process where the coachees were still in the "getting to know" phase. Thus, coaches' background, experience, and expertise would seem to help coachees respect and appreciate their coaches upfront and thus help them decide from the outset whether it is worth investing and thus committing in the coaching relationship and in that particular coach. This is consistent with research that has highlighted that it is useful for the coach to bring a rich career history to the coaching work, because they increase their credibility toward their clients (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999). This finding is also in line with Joo's (2005) theoretical assumption that "a good match" between the coach and coachee in terms of life experiences is "a critical factor for enhancing self-awareness, learning, and thus behavioral change" (p. 480).

It was also evident that closeness in the form of trust, respect, liking, and intimacy facilitated open channels of communication including self-disclosure. On one hand, coaches were able to listen and ask questions and provide feedback in an open, direct, and honest fashion. Communication, especially in the form of giving and receiving feedback, has been thought as an important medium that help coachees to see things under a new light and to recognize habitual resistances, so as to alter the way of thinking and behaving (see, Joo, 2005; Tobias, 1996). On the other hand, coachees were relaxed and comfortable to disclose information. It would also appear that the dyads' ability to communicate openly, appropriately, and sufficiently may have assisted in the maintenance of the partnership over time. This is consistent with work recently conducted by Rhind and Jowett (2011) highlighting that communication in the form of support, assurance, openness, and motivation associated closely with the constructs of closeness, commitment, and complementarity in the coach-athlete relationship.

Commitment was also viewed by participants as an important dimension for the establishment of a good working coaching relationship. Commitment was mainly discussed as displaying one's participation, motivation, engagement, investment, and willingness to maintain the partnership by attending sessions as well as preparing and completing tasks until the goals set out were accomplished. In other words, coaches' and coachees' commitment was evidenced in their persistence to actively and enthusiastically engage in the relationship by working hard, sacrificing time, investing effort and energy. Moreover, participants' level of commitment was reflected in their expressions of dissatisfaction, disappointment, and disgruntle if the coaching relationship had to be terminated before the completion of tasks and goals.

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Commitment or a long-term orientation toward an interdependent relationship would appear to be important within the coaching process as research has demonstrated an association between the number of coaching sessions received by the coachee and better quality coaching relationships (Baron & Morin, 2009). In this study, the notion of commitment, like closeness, would appear to closely reflect the conceptual and operational definitions of commitment within the 3+1Cs model (Jowett, 2007) and is in line with associated sport coaching relationship research that has shown commitment to be associated with better performances and higher levels of satisfaction (e.g., Jowett & Nezelek, 2012; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). It also became evident that coaches and coachees perform complementary behaviors during the coaching sessions, thus supporting the definitions of coaching as a joint process where both members work together (Kilburg, 1996; Whitmore, 2009). Coaches highlighted their role as a facilitator and a supporter with the aim to bring about desired changes to their coachees. Moreover, coaches felt that their role was to lead and transform their coachees by challenging, inspiring, and sensitizing them with the aim to enhance skill development and maximize performance accomplishments. In a similar way, coachees accepted the facilitative, supportive, and leading roles of their coaches while recognizing that they may have to assume a leading role (take charge, direct, lead the procedures) or following role (accept, listen, reflect) depending on the task at hand. It is worth highlighting that both coaches and coachees occupied leading and following roles; these roles were well-orchestrated and dictated by the given task or situation. This set of reciprocal complementary behaviors where one leads while the other follows has also been observed in the coach–athlete relationship (Yang & Jowett, 2010). The balancing of roles between the two members would seem to enhance a sense of structure and organization and partly define cooperation. Consequently, its effect may be directly linked to coachees' skill development and performance success. This conjecture warrants further investigation.

Associations between the four constructs were evident in the participants' reports, revealing the interdependent nature of the key relational components found within the main constructs of the coach–coachee relationship. This finding is in line with theoretical assumptions as these pertain to the definition of two-person relationships (see, Jowett, 2007, 2009) and also with evidence within sport settings (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Frost, 2007; Jowett & Meek, 2000). These interconnections underline the interdependent nature of the constructs and may speak to their potential functions for the maintenance of effective coaching relationships. For example, if complementarity was lacking, then slowly but surely commitment, closeness,

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and/or co-orientation could in turn deteriorate affecting other key coaching processes such as coaching approach and feedback receptivity and in turn important outcomes associated with coachees' development and success. Further research to establish the mutual and causal associations of the major dimensions of the 3+1Cs model is warranted.

There are a number of limitations that need consideration. First, the size of the sample may not allow for generalizability of the results. Although the size was small, it supplied an initial insight into coaches and coachees' perceptions and experiences of the coaching relationship. These findings may generalize to other types of coaching, such as lifestyle coaching, given the central position the coach–coachee relationship has for the success of coaching more generally. Second, the interviews were conducted via telephone. Although telephone interviews are cost- and time-effective, lack of nonverbal communication and control over the environment may limit the expression of experiences and perceptions. Future research should consider conducting research with larger and more diverse samples of participants using one-to-one interviews and/or focus groups or other methods for gathering data with the aim to discern whether individual difference characteristics such as age, gender, experience, and personality can influence the quality of coach–coachee relationships and its outcomes. Third, while the coach–coachee dyadic design that was used in this study was an advantage, its cross-sectional nature provided a rather “static” picture of the quality of the relationship. Longitudinal research may provide a more “dynamic” picture and thus a better understanding of the life cycle of the relational components and dimensions that contained within this relationship. Last but not least, this research aimed to capture only the positive aspects of the coach–coachee relationship; future research could consider a larger sample of participants using quantitative and/or qualitative methods of data collection that aim to specifically explore and capture the negative aspects of this relationship. Such findings are likely to broaden our understanding of the complex dynamics of the coach–coachee relationship in executive coaching and highlight aspects related to interpersonal conflict, incompatibility, disagreements, and misunderstandings that may lead to ineffective coaching process and lack of success.

From a practical viewpoint, understanding what goes on in the coaching relationship allows its members to channel their efforts in building a relationship that is purposeful. Ultimately, the quality of the relationship serves its individual members in terms of providing the medium to bring about change. Thus, supporting coaches to consider not only the professional aspects such as coaching approach and feedback receptivity but also the relational aspects of the coaching process would help them to be more

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constructive in their role. The 3+1Cs model can be used as a diagnostic, prognostic, and educational tool that helps discern weaknesses and strengths in the coaching relationship. Professional coaches could assess whether the dyadic relationship with each one of their coachees contain such relational components as mutual trust, respect, appreciation, and active participation, willingness, investment, as well transactions that are cooperative and well-structured. If their assessments indicate a poor relationship quality, then attempts to enhance the relationship quality may serve them well (Rhind & Jowett, 2011). Relationship enhancement strategies such as (a) managing discrepancies, misunderstandings, dissimilarities by identifying, discussing, solving and monitoring conflictual issues, (b) sharing and exchanging information including personal information that is deemed relevant to the interaction, (c) ensuring that the other is motivated to work with you and to continue sport through appropriate tasks, exercises, and challenges, (d) discussing the expectations, rules, and roles surrounding the relationship and the main goals to be achieved as well as consequences if expectations are not met, (e) knowing that the other person will be there for you should the need arise, and (f) creating a supportive, nurturing, and caring environment via such interpersonal behaviors as being organized, friendly, supportive, responsive, and ready to provide information, advice, and feedback when necessary, could help improve the quality of the relationship (Rhind & Jowett, 2011). Equipping executive coaches (and coachees) with understanding of the role, significance, and substance of the dyadic relationship, as well as with knowledge of relational, communication, and interpersonal skills, is as paramount as the relationships they are forming with their clients.

The 3+1Cs model as a model that helps understand and assess the content and quality of the coaching relationship within the business world would appear a fruitful avenue. Understanding and explaining the complex nature of the coach–coached relationship and its role and functions is an important line of research for coaching psychology because this relationship is considered fundamental for the success of the coaching process and coaching outcomes (e.g., Berry et al., 2011; de Haan, 2008a; Joo, 2005; Jowett et al., 2010; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Lowman, 2005; Passmore, 2010). Based on the findings of this qualitative study, it is evident that the model can have the capacity to satisfactorily map the quality and content of the coach–coachee relationship and thus has the potential to promote our understanding of its complex nature. The findings highlights that if the quality of the relationship is positive, effective, and harmonious, assuming coaches' qualifications, competencies, experiences, and skills on one hand and coachees' openness for the role of coaching itself, then it can potentially provide to

coaches and coachees alike a sound platform from which weaknesses and needs can be expressed and goals and objectives can be achieved. It is thus crucial that the relationship is effective for it to be successful. The 3+1Cs model provides a view into the ties that bind the coach and the coachee as it assesses the quality (content) and quantity (intensity) of the coaching relationship, through a wide range of relational components and dimensions that ebb and flow in social interaction.

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