

EXPERIMENT IN COACHING AS AN INSPIRATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF COACHES

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 6.7.2021

Received in revised form: 23.11.2021

Accepted: 30.11.2021

Keywords:

Competency

Experiment.

Hypothesis

New vision

Professionality

Trust and Safety

Abstract:

The contribution focuses on the method of experiment as an inspiration for the professional and personal growth of ICF approved coaches. It clarifies the key terms for coaches who want to adopt change in their coaching dialogues. If coaches implement something new in their coaching practice or life, experiment helps them to learn, discover, explore, and verify whether this change works and how it works. Experiment helps determine the effectiveness of an intervention. It should be planned, repeatable and verifiable with the outcome that has measurable results.

We focus on the 4th ICF Core Competency: B. Co-Creating the Relationship: 4. Cultivates Trust and Safety. The coach is present in the coaching dialogue as a professional and a person.

Coaches can use experiment as a source of inspiration when they want to:

- 1. Introduce something purposefully into their profession or life and to find out how it works.*
- 2. Change something purposefully and systematically.*
- 3. Exclude something from their personal life or coaching practice.*

This process is the series of steps and observations, the purpose of which is to capture specific changes over time and decide, based on the outcome, whether to take or not to take a few steps into coaching practice or personal life. Experiment is successful when it has been truly implemented and has brought insight into the problem or has brought a new vision. Finally, we introduce professional and personal benefits that a clearly specified hypothesis can bring to coaches.

1 Introduction

The method of experiment can be a source of inspiration for the professional and personal growth of

coaches approved by International Coaching Federation (ICF). When coaches want to examine something new, implement transformation or innovation in their coaching practice, experiment is a good op-

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portunity to learn, discover, explore, and verify whether this innovation works and how it works. Scientific experiment is the method that helps determine the effectiveness of an intervention or the best possible option. Effective experiment is planned, repeatable and verifiable with the outcome that has measurable results [1]. Scientists apply the scientific method when conducting an experiment. The scientific method is the set of procedures and principles that guide how scientists develop research questions, collect the data, and come to conclusions. The four basic steps of the process are [2]:

- Forming a Hypothesis
- Designing a Study and Collecting Data
- Analysing the Data and Reaching Conclusions
- Sharing the Findings.

Scientific experiment can be quantitative (with a clear hypothesis and a larger sample) or qualitative (with a hypothesis that becomes clear to me at the end of the experiment and a small sample). A successful experiment is the one that has been truly implemented and has brought insight into the core of new issue or a new vision. In coaching practice, an experiment can be used to examine something, to discover what it is like, and to find out more about it [3]. For coaches it can be a powerful method to obtain authentic insights and value from coaching dialogues, to experiment how to be more active, reflective focused on the present and more aware of the potential of a change [4]. When coaches want to grow systematically through the method of experiment, it helps them to be more and more present during coaching sessions in agreement with ICF Core Competencies. It also helps them to examine their new behaviour – how it helps a client and me, a coach. When it does not help, a coach can select a new, better option.

The objective of our contribution is to focus on the method of experiment to implement something new into our coaching practice, so that we could learn and discover, explore, and verify how it works and to adopt the best possible solution. The focus is on 4th ICF Core Competency: B. Co-Creating the Relationship: 4. Cultivates Trust and Safety.

2 Experiment in Coaching

Taking an inspiration from scientific experiment helps coaches to be attentively present, and to un-

derstand how exactly they serve clients according to 8 new core competencies (key coaching skills) in four domains. Experiment is the process that can help coaches practise and improve behaviour in a particular ICF core competency or skill (fig. 1).

The experiment gives coaches an opportunity to change purposefully and systematically “reality”, measure outcomes or observe specific changes during coaching sessions. It is a series of steps and observations based on our outcomes, that enables coaches to decide whether to or not to start doing something in our professional or personal life (based on new knowledge or awareness).

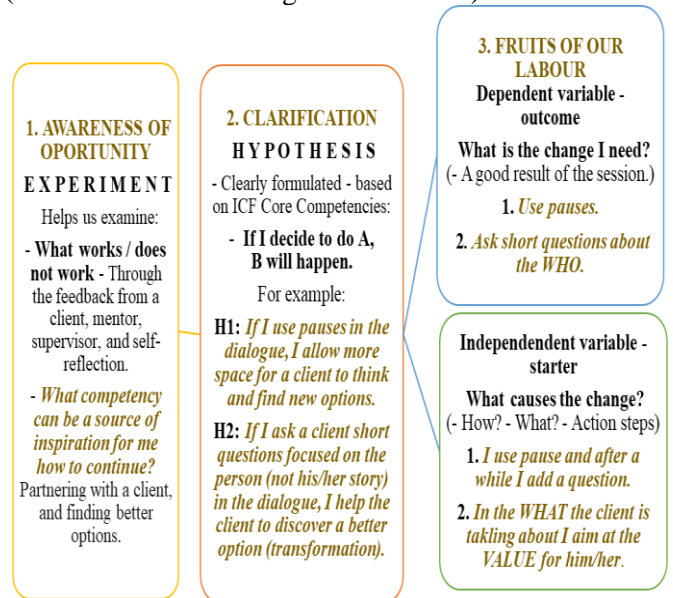


Fig. 1 Experiment in Coaching [1, 5]:

In the beginning of experiment coaches formulate a clear hypothesis, which is an assumption built on a stable basis: “If I decide to do A, it will become B.” For example: “If I stop eating sweets and fats in the evening, I will lose a few kilos and my pressure improves.”

After the formulation of a clear hypothesis coaches work with two variables. These are phenomena that coaches want to examine deeper. The first one is a dependent variable – it is focused on client’s outcome:

- “What will be the good result of this session?”
- “What is meaningful to you?”

The second variable is an independent variable. It is focused on action steps:

- “How would you like to accomplish outcome in your life?”
- “What impact would it make on you?”

Experiment is the process in which we use various instruments that help us to be aware of necessity to change our behaviour:

- a) ICF Core Competency Model [6, 7] with 8 competencies in 4 areas.
- b) Feedback from a client, triad, self-reflexion after a coaching dialogue (after listening to a recording), from a mentor or a supervisor.
- c) Formulation of hypothesis: Based on feedback, and opportunity awareness, a coach formulates a clear hypothesis based on ICF Core Competency Model.
- d) Specify the outcome: What do I need to change for the benefit of a client?
- e) Action steps: How will I accomplish the outcome?
- f) Results: After a recorded coaching session, a coach sends the recording to his/her mentor coach, supervisor, or gets feedback from a client. Here the whole cycle ends, and a coach can repeat the experiment again and improve his or her ICF core competencies.

With the feedback from their clients, mentors, supervisors, or self-reflection coaches can examine how their new behaviour, that they want to implement in their coaching practice, works during the coaching session. The way how coaches analyse what they have found out (the outcomes) is very important feedback. They gain their outcomes from the coaching sessions from their recordings that they send to mentor coaches or supervisors; and by self-reflection after the session via their senses sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste and via perception and observation of phenomena [8].

3 Experiment Focused on Maintaining Trust and Safety

When we want to apply experiment in coaching, we need to formulate a hypothesis that stands on the solid foundations and examine it precisely (If I implement A – the B will happen). ICF Core Competencies and the ICF Code of Ethics represent solid foundations for us coaches.

In this contribution we explain how to make experiment in our coaching using the 4th competence of the 2nd domain: B. Co-creating the relationship: 4. Cultivates Trust and Safety [6, 7]:

Definition: Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

1. Seeks to understand the client within their context which may include their identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs
2. Demonstrates respect for the client’s identity, perceptions, style, and language and adapts one’s coaching to the client
3. Acknowledges and respects the client’s unique talents, insights, and work in the coaching process
4. Shows support, empathy, and concern for the client
5. Acknowledges and supports the client’s expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, and suggestions
6. Demonstrates openness and transparency to display vulnerability and build trust with the client.

How do coaches know that they maintain trust and safety? To all of coaches the words trust, and safety mean something else. We will use the experiment to become an experimentalist. Let us say that the starter will be partnership to a client and its outcome will be trust and safety (table 1):

Table 1 Depended and Independent Variables of our Experiment

Starter (How?)	→	Outcome (What?)
Partnership	→	Trust and safety

The research question that coaches can ask is:
 – When I seek to achieve partnership to my clients, how much do I contribute to trust and a safety?
 ICF hypothesis:
 – I assume that through partnership with clients, I contribute to increased trust and a safety.

Why a research question is not enough, and a hypothesis is needed? Because a good research question should be SMART: Specific – Measurable – Achievable – Relevant and Time bound. The hy-

hypothesis asks experimentalists to answer “Yes or No” directly – to be clear and explicit. According to that, experimentalists accept or reject the hypothesis; do not accept it or accept something else in their life. It is important to decide what I want to include in my experiment from my way of maintaining trust and a safety.

4 Helpful Questions for the Experiment Before, During and After Coaching

The method of experiment can be used by coaches who want to change something or improve their coaching skills and use it in their coaching sessions. In this contribution we focus on the 4th core competency of the 2nd domain B. Co-creating the relationship: 4. Cultivates Trust and Safety [6, 7].

As our experiences are unique ones, there will be various answers to the following questions:

1. What would you like to implement in your coaching that would contribute to increased trust and safety in a coaching session?
 - a) Express empathy and care.
 - b) Support a client.
 - c) Partner with a client.

Example:

“I have tendency to use long sentences:

- What do I want to change?

I want to use short sentences.

- How will I realise it?

I will consciously shorten my sentences.”

2. How do you know that your sentences are short enough?

Example:

“Clients will do 70-80 % talking and I (a coach) only 30-20 %.”

3. What values do you want to create?

Example:

“I believe that I will express authentic interest in the client and his/her situation and my desire to help him or her.”

It is important to verify the results of what a coach wants to implement in a coaching session. It is also important to receive the feedback from our clients by asking them the following questions:

- “In this coaching session I tried to ... Have you seen / perceived / heard that during the dialogue?”
- “How do you know that I performed it?”
- “How did you feel when I performed it?”

5 The Benefits and Blind Spots of Formulating Clear Hypothesis in Experiment

When coaches decide what they want to experiment with in their coaching dialogue, it is of great importance to formulate their hypothesis in a clear and understandable language based on ICF Core Competencies:

- a) What good result of your experiment do you expect (the change you wish – dependable variable)?
- b) What action steps you need to implement it?

Finally, coaches verify their outcomes and receive the important indicators of the quality of experiment which contribute to the development of their professionalism or personality:

Professional benefits relate to:

- Development of honesty, patience, and courage.
- Development of coaching skills.
- Learning and new awareness.

Personal benefits relate to:

- Becoming a better person.
- Work on assumptions and prejudices.
- Implement a particular change in one's life.

If the hypothesis is not clearly formulated, is vague or metaphoric, the results are the following failures of a professional or a person:

Professional blind spots relate to the following:

- Violation of ethics.
- The results of my work are superficial.

Personal blind spots relate to the following:

- I cannot improve as a human if the hypothesis is based on prejudice.
- I confirm my human value.
- It serves as a proof that I am right.

6 Conclusion

Every coach should maintain presence in his or her coaching session as a professional and a person. Experiment can serve coaches as a tool to learn and verify the outcomes when they:

- a) Are determined to implement something into their professional life and see how it works.
- b) Want to change something purposefully and systematically.
- c) Want to exclude something from their professional life and see how it works.

Experiment in coaching is a process, a series of steps and observations, the purpose of which is to verify whether something (knowledge or reality) can or cannot be implemented in good coaching practice or personal life of coaches.

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