Towards A Better Understanding of Workplace Coaching:
On Goal Activities, Exploration Practices, and Coaches' Life Satisfaction

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Darüber hinaus danke ich allen Coaches, die an unseren Studien teilgenommen haben und mir so Einblicke in ihre Tätigkeit gewehrt haben.

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Summary

Whereas there is a high and ever-increasing demand for coaching worldwide (International Coach Federation, 2016) and meta-analytical findings suggest that coaching is generally effective (e.g., Jones et al., 2016; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015), little is still known about standards for "good" coaching practice (e.g., Bono et al., 2009; Vandaveer et al., 2016). Across three studies, this dissertation investigates relevant facets of coaching practice. It addresses the questions of how coaches practice workplace coaching and how their coaching practice in turn relates to their life satisfaction.

Study 1 addresses the question of the relevance of goal activities in workplace coaching. A systematic literature review was conducted to summarize the extant empirical findings on working with goals in coaching. The results of 24 studies that investigate (a) the occurrence of goal activities in workplace coaching and/or (b) the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcomes were synthesized. The findings indicate that goal activities take a wide range of different forms within coaching practice and research (e.g., goal setting, setting action/development plans, goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee). Coaches report working with goals frequently, while coachees report this occurring less frequently. Some study findings suggest a positive relationship between working with goals and coaching outcomes, whereas other studies report no significant association. Initial findings point to possible moderating variables (e.g., coachee characteristics, initiator of goal activity) and potential challenges in involving organizational stakeholders in goal activities.

Study 2 focuses on exploration practices in workplace coaching, more specifically, on methods that coaches utilize and topics that they address during the initial exploration of coaching engagements. German-speaking workplace coaches ($N = 218$) with various backgrounds completed an online survey. Five dimensions of exploration practices emerged: Exploration of the coachee's (1) professional context (e.g., coachee's professional position) and (2) personal context (e.g., coachee's current family situation), using (3) standardized

methods (e.g., personality inventories) and (4) active and creative methods (e.g., role-playing), and (5) clarification of coaching issues and goals (e.g., exploration of "hidden" coaching issues). The coach's background (i.e., gender, coaching experience, academic education, coach or psychotherapy training, and coaching approach) was analyzed to gain insight into how this relates to the reported exploration practices. Certain aspects of these practices could be predicted by coaches' coaching experience, their affiliation with certain coaching approaches (i.e., psychoanalytic/psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, transactional analysis, and neuro-linguistic programming), whether the coach holds a degree in social sciences/education and whether they attended coach training.

Study 3 concerns how satisfied workplace coaches are with their lives (i.e., job, leisure time, financial situation), the extent of their experienced mental strain related to their coaching practice, and whether coaching supervision influences coaches' job satisfaction. An online survey ($N = 110$) was conducted. The findings indicate that workplace coaches were rather satisfied with their life and that they experienced relatively low work-related mental strain. However, if coaches experienced a high amount of work-related mental strain, use of supervision has a significant buffering effect on the coaches' job satisfaction. It therefore seems that coaching supervision might be an effective reflective practice and useful strategy when it comes to coaches' self-care.

Taken together, this dissertation strives to approach important and hitherto neglected areas of empirical research on coaching practice. The results of the respective studies are discussed and implications for different stakeholders are explored.

Zusammenfassung

Obwohl es weltweit eine hohe und stetig wachsende Nachfrage nach Coaching gibt (International Coach Federation, 2016) und meta-analytische Befunde darauf hindeuten, dass Coaching wirkt (z.B. Jones et al., 2016; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015), ist über Standards „guter" Coachingpraxis noch wenig bekannt (z.B. Bono et al., 2009; Vandaveer et al., 2016). In dieser Dissertation werden in drei Studien relevante Facetten von Coachingpraxis untersucht. Es wird empirisch untersucht, wie Coaches Coaching praktizieren und sich ihre Coachingpraxis wiederum auf ihre Lebenszufriedenheit auswirkt.

Studie 1 befasst sich mit der Frage nach der Relevanz von Zielaktivitäten im arbeitsbezogenen Coaching (*Workplace Coaching*). Es wurde ein systematischer Literatur-Review über die vorhandenen empirischen Befunde zur Arbeit mit Zielen im Workplace Coaching durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse von 24 Studien, die (a) das Auftreten von Zielaktivitäten im Workplace Coaching und/oder (b) die Beziehung zwischen Zielaktivitäten und Coaching-Outcome untersuchen, wurden zusammengefasst. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass Zielaktivitäten in der Coachingpraxis und -forschung verschiedene Formen annehmen (z.B. Zielsetzung, Festlegen von Entwicklungsplänen, zielorientierte Coach-Coachee-Beziehung). Coaches geben an, dass sie häufig mit Zielen arbeiten, wohingegen Coachees berichten, dass dies seltener vorkommt. Während einige Studienergebnisse auf eine positive Beziehung zwischen Zielaktivitäten und Coaching-Outcomes hindeuten, wird in anderen Studien kein signifikanter Zusammenhang berichtet. Erste empirische Ergebnisse deuten auf mögliche Moderatorvariablen (z.B. Eigenschaften des Coachees, Initiator der Zielaktivität) und potentielle Herausforderungen bei der Einbeziehung von Stakeholdern in die Zielaktivitäten hin.

Studie 2 widmet sich Coachingpraktiken während der anfänglichen Exploration im Coachingprozess, das heißt Methoden, die Coaches anwenden und Themen, die Coaches ansprechen. Coaches ($N = 218$) mit diversen Ausbildungshintergründen nahmen an einer

Onlinestudie teil. Es zeigten sich fünf Dimensionen der anfänglichen Exploration: Exploration des (1) beruflichen Kontexts (z.B. berufliche Position des Coachees) und (2) persönlichen Kontexts (z.B. aktuelle Familiensituation des Coachees) des Coachees, der Einsatz (3) standardisierter Methoden (z.B. Persönlichkeitstests) und (4) kreativer und aktiver Methoden (z.B. Rollenspiele) und (5) die Klärung von Coachingthemen und -zielen (z.B. Exploration des „Themas hinter dem Thema"). Es wurde analysiert, ob der Hintergrund der Coaches (Geschlecht, Coachingerfahrung, akademische Ausbildung, Coaching- oder Psychotherapie-Ausbildung, Coachingansatz) mit der berichteten Coachingpraxis während der anfänglichen Exploration zusammenhängt. Einige Aspekte der anfänglichen Exploration konnten signifikant durch die Coachingerfahrung, ihre Zugehörigkeit zu bestimmten Coachingansätzen (psychoanalytisch/psychodynamisch, kognitiv-behavioral, Transaktionsanalyse und Neurolinguistisches Programmieren), einen akademischen Abschluss in Sozialwissenschaften/Pädagogik und das Absolvieren einer Coaching-Ausbildung vorhergesagt werden.

Studie 3 befasst sich mit der Lebenszufriedenheit von Coaches (Zufriedenheit mit ihrem Beruf, ihrer Freizeit und finanziellen Situation), dem Ausmaß der empfundenen psychischen Beanspruchung im Kontext ihrer Coachingtätigkeit und der Frage, ob Supervision die Arbeitszufriedenheit der Coaches beeinflusst. Es wurde eine Onlinestudie mit 110 Coaches durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Coaches im Vergleich zu repräsentativen Normstichproben zufrieden mit ihrem Leben sind und sie eine relativ geringe arbeitsbedingte psychische Beanspruchung erleben. Wenn Coaches jedoch ein hohes Maß an arbeitsbedingter psychischer Beanspruchung erfahren, hat der Einsatz von Supervision einen signifikanten Puffer-Effekt auf ihre Arbeitszufriedenheit. Supervision scheint daher eine wirksame reflektive Praxis und erfolgreiche Strategie für das Aufrechterhalten der Arbeitszufriedenheit von Coaches darzustellen.

Zusammengefasst widmet sich die vorliegende Dissertation wichtigen und bisher in der Empirie vernachlässigten Bereichen der Coachingpraxis. Die Ergebnisse der jeweiligen Studien werden diskutiert und Implikationen für verschiedene Interessengruppen erörtert.

1   Introduction

Falling down the rabbit hole can be interpreted as a metaphor for entry into the unknown. (…) During her journey, [Alice] tries to understand the ways of the world. (…) Wonderland represents a place of madness – a transitional space where the normal rules of behavior are no longer valid. As the Cheshire cat says, "We're all mad here."

(M. Kets de Vries, 2019, p. 4)

Kets de Vries (2019) questions whether everyone has gone mad after falling down the rabbit hole and woken up in today's world, that is, a "dystopian Wonderland" or the "Age of Trump" (pp. 4-5). He uses the story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a metaphor and a parallel "for our efforts to become enlightened, to find the truth, to understand what is happening around us" (p. 4) concerning leadership in organizations. In a similar vein, I dedicate this dissertation to gaining a better understanding of what is happening in today's (mad) world of coaching in which it also sometimes appears as though the "normal rules of behavior are no longer valid", or, more precisely, no rules of behavior yet exist.

During the last few years, rapid growth in the demand for coaching has been observed and coaching practitioners foresee increases in the number of potential coaching clients and coaching sessions in the near future (International Coach Federation, 2016; Passmore et al., 2018). In order to meet this growing demand, the number of coaching practitioners worldwide, with heterogeneous educational and occupational backgrounds, is expanding (e.g., Bachkirova et al., 2017; Bono et al., 2009; Grant, 2005). This also means that there is most likely a great divergence in methods applied during coaching practice without any clear definitions of what coaching is (or is not) or universally accepted standards for coaching practice (Vandaveer et al., 2016). Taking into consideration that the terms "coaching" or "coach" have "precious little statutory or professional protection" (de Haan, 2008, p. 5), the coaching field and industry are mostly unregulated and not yet distinct or coherent and they

also lack rules with identifiable boundaries (e.g., Gettman et al., 2019; Stober & Parry, 2005). If indeed "every man and his dog" (Grant, 2005, p. 1), attracted by the considerable amount of money that can be made (Kets de Vries, 2013), offer coaching, what does this imply about the quality of the coaching services provided and its effects on both the persons being coached (i.e., coachees) and the coaches themselves? This circumstance raises the issue of how coaches conduct coaching (i.e., what is actually happening during coaching sessions; Bachkirova et al., 2015) and how they ensure the quality of their work (e.g., through practices of self-care; Clutterbuck et al., 2016).

Recent meta-analyses and empirical reviews on the effectiveness and the antecedents of the coaching outcome (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Burt & Talati, 2017; de Meuse et al., 2009; Ely et al., 2010; Graßmann et al., 2020; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Pandolfi, 2020; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015; Theeboom et al., 2014) conclude that, in general, coaching has manifold positive effects for coachees. However, the reported effect sizes are largely heterogeneous, thus indicating that some coaching processes are highly successful while others are not (Graßmann et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is also empirical evidence on the negative effects of coaching both for coachees and coaches (e.g., Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). Little is yet known however about which coaching practice is helpful and which coach behavior might have detrimental effects on the coachee and/or the coach him- or herself (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). In addition, it is rather unclear what coaches do when they coach (Bachkirova et al., 2015; Gettman et al., 2019; Vandaveer et al., 2016). Bono and colleagues (2009, p. 362) argued that: "Despite the widespread use of executive coaches in corporations, much of the process and practice of executive coaching remains shrouded in mystery." Unfortunately, eleven years later, this is still the current state (e.g., Gettman et al., 2019).

By presenting and summarizing the findings of three studies, this dissertation takes further steps in the direction of a professionalization of coaching by gaining a better understanding of workplace coaching practices and how the coaches' work relates to their experienced mental strain and life satisfaction. The aim of this dissertation is threefold. Firstly, considering that workplace coaching is often defined as a goal-oriented intervention (e.g., Grant, 2005; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015), goals have received much attention both in coaching practice and research (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). There is however a lack of a systematic summary of empirical findings on the relevance of goal activities in workplace coaching (e.g., Bozer & Jones, 2018). The first aim of this dissertation is therefore to examine which forms of goal activities have been researched so far, how frequently goal activities are reported as being used in workplace coaching by coaches and former coachees, and whether the extant empirical findings indicate that goals are indeed a – or even *the* – "sacred cow" of coaching, as has been proposed (Scoular & Linley, 2006, p. 9). The second aim of this dissertation is to examine coaching practices during the *initial exploration* stage of coaching. Coach behavior and interactions between coach and coachee during the beginning of coaching engagements are particularly crucial for the whole coaching process and coaching outcome (e.g., Dagley, 2009; Gettman et al., 2019; Ianiro et al., 2013; Möller & Kotte, 2013; Möller & Kotte, 2018). However, it is still unclear which exploration practices are applied among workplace coaches, that is, which topics coaches address and which methods they utilize during the initial exploration of coaching engagements. The results of a recent survey of coaches in Germany ($N = 378$; Stephan & Rötz, 2018) indicate an evident diversity of educational backgrounds among coaches. For instance, there was an almost even distribution when it came to participants reported having either an academic degree in economics, psychology, or social studies, or else having completed vocational training and having no academic degree whatsoever. Considering this heterogeneity of educational backgrounds among coaches, the question arises of how much they might differ

from each other in the exploration practices they utilize. Thirdly, seeing that coaching is described as a helping profession (e.g., Clutterbuck et al., 2016), previous findings hint at the possibility that coaches are in danger of suffering negative effects caused by their coaching practice (e.g., Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). This raises the question of how much coaches suffer from work-related mental strain and how satisfied coaches are with their lives in general and their job as a coach in particular. Furthermore, it is rather uncertain what methods are successful in helping to maintain a high level of job satisfaction when acting as a workplace coach, that is, strategies of reflective practice or self-care of coaches. Prior research suggests positive effects of coaching supervision for the coach (e.g., Graßmann & Schermuly, 2018). However, there is a lack of research to date concerning the relationship between the experienced mental strain, the job satisfaction, and the use of coaching supervision of workplace coaches. Addressing this gap in coaching research is the third aim of this dissertation.

In summary, this dissertation aims to provide novel insights into (a) the relevance of working with goals in coaching, (b) the frequency of application of initial exploration practices and the influence of coach background on initial exploration practices utilized by workplace coaches, and (c) workplace coaches' life satisfaction. The findings of the conducted studies have important implications for researchers, coaching practitioners, potential coachees, providers of coach training programs, and organizational coach commissioners (i.e., human resource management professionals who are charged with the responsibility of choosing the "right" coach for employees of their organization; Passmore et al., 2017).

2   Theoretical Background

In this section, I provide a theoretical background that frames the research studies that have been conducted in the course of this dissertation. I start by presenting a definition of

workplace coaching then give a brief outline of the current state of coaching research (i.e., on the effectiveness of coaching, the antecedents of coaching outcome, and the state of play of coaching practices). I conclude this section by introducing the extant research on (a) working with goals in coaching, (b) the assessment and exploration practices in coaching, and (c) the mental strain, life satisfaction, and use of coaching supervision by workplace coaches.

2.1 Definition of Workplace Coaching

Since various definitions of coaching have been offered in the coaching literature and the term is not legally protected, I present a definition that I used in the course of my research studies which focus on *workplace coaching*. In agreement with previous scholars, I define workplace coaching as a one-on-one learning and development intervention that is designed to support and enhance individual and organizational performance, and that uses a collaborative, reflective, and goal-focused relationship to achieve outcomes (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Passmore et al., 2019). Namely, it is an intervention with and for non-clinical adults (i.e., coachees) regarding work-related issues that is provided by a professional coach with no formal authority over the coachee (Grant, 2005; Graßmann et al., 2020). This definition thus includes coaching that is delivered to both executives and non-executive employees in workplace settings (Grant et al., 2010). It encompasses executive, leadership, business, and professional coaching. However, it excludes managerial or supervisory coaching (i.e., coaching provided by the coachee's supervisor), team or group coaching, life coaching (i.e., coaching mostly on personal issues), coaching of minors, or other non-work-related coaching, for example, sports or health coaching.

2.2 Current State of Coaching Research

There is not only an increasing demand for coaching by individuals who want to *be coached* (e.g., Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015) but also major interest from professionals who

want to *become a coach* and enter the coaching market (e.g., Grant, 2005). At the same time, scholars argue that the coaching industry still seeks professional legitimacy (e.g., Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). In the following section, the current state of coaching research is presented, namely, what we empirically know about the effectiveness of coaching, the antecedents of the coaching outcome, and coaching practices that have been reported as being commonly applied in coaching practice.

2.2.1 (How) Does Coaching Work? Research on the Effectiveness of Coaching and Antecedents of Coaching Outcome

It has been commonly proposed that coaching research is still in its "infancy" or very early stages and that empirical research has not kept pace with the growth of coaching in practice or practitioner literature (e.g., de Haan et al., 2011; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Gettman et al., 2019; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). In the meantime, although coaching is still described as an emerging profession (e.g., de Haan, 2019), a substantial number of research studies on the effectiveness of coaching has emerged. In fact, scholars have recently postulated that coaching research has now reached a level where statistical synopses are possible (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). The findings of recent meta-analyses (Burt & Talati, 2017; de Meuse et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2016; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015; Theeboom et al., 2014) and systematic literature reviews on coaching effectiveness (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; de Haan, 2019; Ely et al., 2010; Grover & Furnham, 2016) indicate that, overall, coaching works. More precisely, the findings suggest that coaching has numerous positive effects for the coachees. Positive outcomes include, for example, an improvement in the coachee's goal attainment, well-being, work-related attitudes (e.g., organizational commitment, job satisfaction), and work performance as well as the coachee's personal and cognitive development (e.g., personal management/self-control, skills/abilities), and behavioral changes in relation to others (e.g., leadership skills).

Furthermore, the findings indicate that coaching also has positive effects for the coachee's organization (e.g., lower absence rates) and the coach him- or herself (e.g., coach's personal development). However, the reported effect sizes vary considerably across meta-analyses. Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al. (2015) report an average effect size of $d = 0.11$ on overall coaching outcomes for the coachee (e.g., coachee's goal attainment, behavioral changes). De Meuse et al. (2009) report the differences between pre-coaching and post-coaching ratings by indicating δ (i.e., the estimated population true effect size of d, corrected for sampling error and unreliability). They found effects of δ = 0.50 (other-ratings) and δ = 1.27 (self-ratings of coachees) on skill/performance improvements of the coachee. There is a diversity across meta-analyses and systematic reviews of how coaching is defined, which inclusion criteria were applied (e.g., including studies on life and work-related coaching vs. only including studies on executive coaching specifically), and how outcome was measured. More specifically, while some of the secondary work included primary studies on both life and workplace coaching interventions (Burt & Talati, 2017; Theeboom et al., 2014), others focused on any work-related coaching (i.e., also including student coachee samples; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015) or on workplace or business coaching for professionals (Blackman et al., 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; de Haan, 2019; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Jones et al., 2016), or else concentrated exclusively on executive or leadership coaching (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; de Meuse et al., 2009; Ely et al., 2010). Accordingly, the number of included primary studies of extant meta-analyses ranges from six studies (de Meuse et al., 2009) to 24 studies (Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015). In addition, the effect sizes vary between studies *within* meta-analyses and reviews. For example, in the literature review conducted by Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2018), while 70 studies report positive outcomes of coaching, 16 studies reported either negative or not-fully positive outcomes. Taken together, the findings indicate that coaching overall is effective but not *every* coaching intervention is, that is, the impact of the coaching intervention can be inconsistent

from one intervention to another. Scholars therefore discuss the potential pitfalls of coaching (e.g., Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). This is further supported by the findings of negative effects of coaching for the coachee (e.g., decreases in job satisfaction) and the coach (e.g., being personally negatively affected by coaching practice) that supposedly occur rather frequently (e.g., Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019).

Considering that it has been established that coaching is effective in general, the discussion has moved to the question of what predicts coaching effectiveness (Graßmann et al., 2020). There exist first empirical indications of coach and coachee characteristics that positively affect coaching outcome. Regarding *coach* characteristics, empirical evidence suggests that internal coaches are more successful than external coaches (Jones et al., 2016) and that coaches with a mixed background are more effective than coaches with a pure psychology or pure non-psychology background (Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015). Specific *coaching practices* or *coach behavior* (e.g., active listening, empathy) can also positively influence coaching outcomes (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). By contrast, using multisource feedback measures (e.g., 360-degree-feedback) during coaching can negatively impact upon coaching effectiveness (Jones et al., 2016). Concerning *coachee* variables, the coachee's level of self-efficacy and coaching motivation or commitment as well as the coachee's expectations about coaching and learning goal orientation have empirically been found to be antecedents of coaching effectiveness (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Jones, 2018; de Haan, 2019). In addition, study results highlight the relevance of the *coaching relationship* between coach and coachee (i.e., affective bonding, agreement on tasks and goals, and trust between coach and coachee) on coaching outcome (Bozer & Jones, 2018; de Haan, 2019; Graßmann et al., 2020; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015). Pandolfi (2020) argues that, whereas first empirical evidence on coachee and coach characteristics and the coaching relationship as "active ingredients" of coaching outcomes exists, the *coaching process* and *contextual elements* of coaching engagements (e.g., organizational culture and

support) still remain largely unexplored areas in current coaching research. In summary, scholars conclude that the research base and the knowledge on coaching success factors or the determinants of coaching effectiveness remain limited (e.g., Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Jones, 2018).

2.2.2 What Do Coaches Do When They Coach? Previous Research on Coaching Practices

In 2004, Sherman and Freas argued that the executive coaching industry is as chaotic, unexplored, and fraught with risk as the "Wild West of yesteryear" (p. 82). It should be noted that the coaching literature has grown significantly during the last 16 years. However, there is still a paucity of knowledge about what coaches *do* in their usual practice and what is actually happening during coaching interactions and sessions (Bachkirova et al., 2015; Bono et al., 2009; Gettman et al., 2019; Jordan & Kauffeld, 2020). A few initial empirical studies, predominantly conducted with coaches from the USA, have shed some light on this area (see Table A1 for an overview). Some research studies addressed the frequency of using a range of different coaching practices (e.g., Bachkirova et al., 2015; Bastian, 2015; Bechtel, 2018; Bono et al., 2009; Diermann et al., under review; Jenkins et al., 2012; Jenson, 2016; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008; Marshall, 2006; Newsom & Dent, 2011; Vandaveer et al., 2016). Other studies focused on the frequency of using specific coaching practices, for example, goal setting (David et al., 2014; Wastian & Poetschki, 2016) or psychometric tests (Del Giudice et al., 2014; McDowall & Smewing, 2009). The findings indicate that, among others, asking questions, conducting interviews with the coachee, goal setting, and using multisource feedback are reported as being frequently used coaching practices (e.g., Bachkirova et al., 2015; Bastian, 2015; Bono et al., 2009; David et al., 2014; Diermann et al., under review; Jenkins et al., 2012; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008; McDowall & Smewing, 2009). By contrast, cognitive-ability or aptitude tests, job shadowing, or role-playing are among the less popular coaching practices (e.g., Bono et al., 2009; Jenkins et al., 2012; Vandaveer et al.,

2016). Scholars of recent studies conclude that "the examination of coach behavior is a worthwhile endeavor" (Gettman et al., 2019, p. 48) and that there is still a need for more research on coaching practices to "lay the groundwork for the eventual establishment of meaningful and broadly applicable standards for the professional practice of coaching" (Vandaveer et al., 2016, p. 140).

2.3 Goals in Coaching: (SMART) Dreams with Deadlines?

Goals are a central feature of coaching literature (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). Considering that goal setting and goal attainment are regularly described as key components, unquestioned elements, or the central foundation of coaching practice (e.g., Clutterbuck & David, 2016; Cowan, 2013; David et al., 2014), this is hardly surprising. It has been proposed that goal setting is "ubiquitous in today's fast-changing society" (Boyatzis & Howard, 2016, p. 213) and that "human beings are essentially goal-directed organisms" (Grant, 2012, p. 153). Goals can be understood as "internal representations of desired states or outcomes" (Grant, 2012, p. 148) or, put differently, "dreams with deadlines" (David et al., 2016, p. XXIX). Goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002) is not only one of the most prominent paradigms in the management and organizational psychology literature but has also been one of the most influential theories in coaching research and practice (Ordóñez et al., 2009; Theeboom et al., 2014). Locke and Latham (1990, 2002) postulated the goal setting theory based on decades of empirical research. The results of numerous studies in laboratory and field settings suggest that setting specific and (sufficiently) challenging goals leads to higher performance than setting vague, easy goals (e.g., "do your best") or setting no goals. Striving for specific goals directs people's attention and hence motivates them. One of the strongest findings in organizational psychology is that the clearer the goal, the higher the performance (Scoular & Linley, 2006). Factors that emerged as moderators of goal attainment are the individual's commitment to achieve the goal and having access to feedback on the goal progress.

Prominent goal concepts in coaching are, among others, SMART goal setting (i.e., setting goals that are Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, and Time-related; Doran, 1981) and the GROW model (following the stages of Goal setting, Reality check, Options, and Will in coaching; Whitmore, 2010). But how smart really is working with SMART goals in coaching? Ordóñez et al. (2009) argue that many organizations rely (too) heavily on goal setting while very little attention is given to its potential negative side effects (e.g., neglecting important but non-specified goals or employees' increased risk-taking behavior due to pursuing their goals). In a similar vein, Clutterbuck and Spence (2017) discuss that, in coaching, goals might need some time to emerge and coachees should be able to change their goal(s) during the coaching process. Put differently, "SMART goals can dumb-down coaching" (Grant, 2012, p. 147). Scholars therefore discuss the pitfalls of simplistic goal approaches (David et al., 2014) and the "tyranny of overly specific goals" within the coaching community (Clutterbuck, 2010, p. 73). Given this controversy on the use of goals in coaching, a summary of extant empirical research on the effects of goal activities on coaching outcome appears necessary.

2.4 Coaching Practices during the Initial Exploration of Coaching

Coach behavior and interactions between coach and coachee during the beginning of coaching engagements are supposed to be particularly crucial for the whole coaching process and coaching outcome (e.g., Dagley, 2009; Ely et al., 2010; Gettman et al., 2019; Ianiro et al., 2013; Möller & Kotte, 2013; Möller & Kotte, 2018). De Haan (2019) argues that an important first step of coaching is that the coach and the coachee investigate what the coachee wants to accomplish, or more specifically, that coaches explore what the coaching is for. The International Coach Federation (2018) states that it is the responsibility of the coach to discover, clarify, and align with what the coachee wants to achieve in coaching. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests a relationship between a lack of focus in the coaching

engagement and negative effects of coaching for the coachee (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). Alongside such factors as the coach's credibility, empathy, and respect, human resources professionals who are responsible for purchasing coaching services describe the coach's diagnostic skill and insight as relevant coaching capabilities of an "exceptional coach" (Dagley, 2009). However, although it is argued among therapists that psychotherapy is only as good as its diagnostic (e.g., Ehlert, 2007), the topic has been neglected in extant coaching research. Furthermore, there exists no agreed-upon standardization of practice within the coaching industry of *how* to gain that initial understanding or insight. In other words, it is unclear how coaches are supposed to "get to the nub of the issue" (Dagley, 2009, p. 68) or build a mutual understanding of the coachee's issue (Clutterbuck, 2010). As discussed above, there is a dearth of research on the range of applied coaching practices among coaches in general (e.g., Bono et al., 2009), let alone on coach behavior in specific phases of the coaching process such as the initial exploration (Diermann et al., under review; Gettman et al., 2019). This raises the question of what coaches do during the initial exploration of coaching, namely, which methods they utilize and which topics they address in order to gather sufficient information on their coachees during the beginning of new coaching engagements. Integrating previously introduced process models of coaching (e.g., Barner, 2006; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Gettman et al., 2019; The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015), Diermann et al. (under review) propose a coaching process model that contains the stages of pre-coaching, contracting, assessment, intervention, and evaluation. They define initial exploration practices as all activities initiated by the coach to gather information about their coachee (e.g., about the latter's situation, context, and coaching goal) with the purpose of deducing appropriate interventions for the coaching engagement before the intervention stage is entered (i.e., activities during pre-coaching, contracting, and assessment). Figure 1 displays where the initial exploration is positioned in a coaching process model.

Figure 1

Position of the Initial Exploration within the Coaching Process
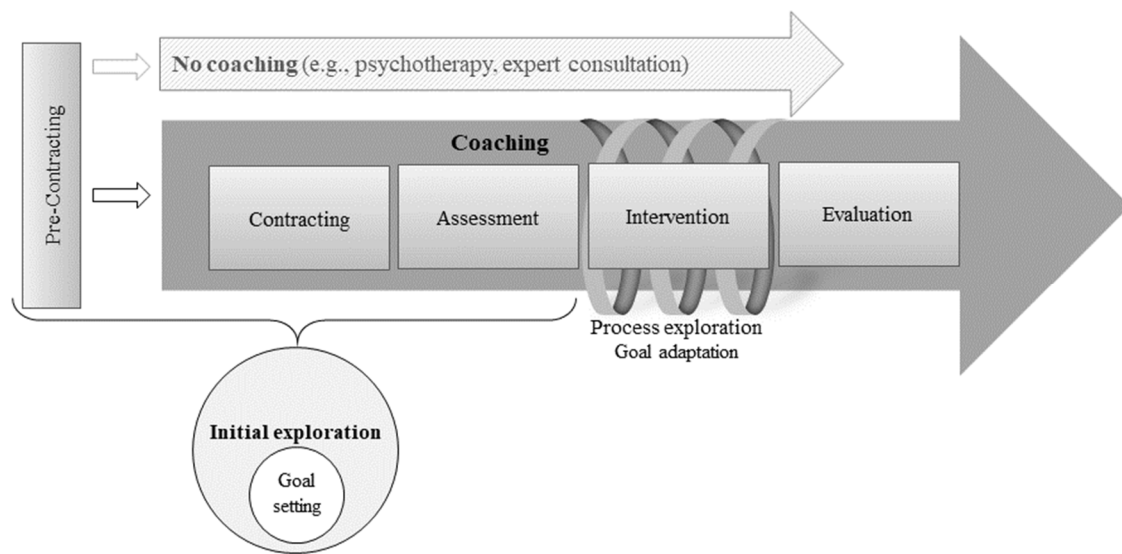
Kets de Vries (2013, p. 32) describes that he has met many "self-anointed coaches, who have some familiarity with the training of athletes, pop psychology, or an elementary knowledge of group dynamics (…) [who] don't seem to be aware of the fundamental forces they are unleashing, or the potential harm they may cause". Given the diversity of (e.g., educational) backgrounds among coaches and a lack of agreement as to what education or skill set coaches theoretically need for their practice, an ongoing debate exists about who should (or should not) be conducting coaching (e.g., Bastian, 2015). Accordingly, the issue has been raised whether, for instance, only coaches with psychological training can successfully conduct assessments with their coachees and detect deep-rooted problems (i.e., psychological difficulties or the presence of a mental disorder) in the coachee that would be more appropriate for psychotherapy than coaching (e.g., Bastian, 2015; Bono et al., 2009). Few studies to date report findings on the influence of academic training on coaches' coaching practices and the extant findings are inconclusive (Bastian, 2015; Bono et al., 2009; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008). Another unanswered question therefore is whether coaches with different backgrounds diverge in how they conduct the initial exploration of coaching.

2.5 Life Satisfaction and Reflective Practice of Coaches

Life satisfaction can be understood as individual evaluations of past and present living conditions and future prospects on one's life overall (i.e., global life satisfaction) or specific areas of life (e.g., health, work, financial situation; i.e., domain-specific life satisfaction; Fahrenberg et al., 2000). Studying the life satisfaction of specific groups of professionals has previously been a rather popular research interest. For instance, researchers devoted a great deal of empirical attention to better understanding the life satisfaction of professional helpers (e.g., psychotherapists, counsellors, social workers) and its impact on their job performance and risk of burnout (e.g., Cushway & Tyler, 1996; Hessel et al., 2009; Nissen-Lie et al., 2013; Visser et al., 2003). This is due to the fact that the occurrence of burnout is supposed to be particularly likely in high-stake and high-stress professions such as mental health provision, given that dealing with the negative emotions of others can be a challenging and emotionally draining task (e.g., Andreychik, 2019). In fact, research indicates that psychotherapists and professionals working in the social sector report higher levels of cognitive and emotional strain (i.e., rumination and emotional irritation) than the general working population (Mohr, Müller, & Rigotti, 2005; Reimer et al., 2005). Nonetheless, even though previous meta-analytic findings suggest a negative relationship between experiences of emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction (Lee et al., 2011; Lee & Ashforth, 1996), clinical psychologists and psychotherapists reported that they are satisfied with their working situation and their life overall (Hessel et al., 2009; Radeke & Mahoney, 2000; Reimer et al., 2005). Coaches might also experience "emotionally draining and burdensome" situations with their coachees at times (Clutterbuck et al., 2016, p. 7) and encounter high work-related mental strain (Mohr et al., 2006). Indeed, empirical evidence indicates that negative effects of coaching for the coach (e.g., low psychological health or lack of social integration) not only exist but are rather common among coaches and relate to coaches' experiences of emotional exhaustion and stress (Graßmann et al., 2019; Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). It has been argued that

professional helpers such as coaches carry high ethical responsibilities, namely, to care for themselves in order to be able to help others, or put differently, to fulfill the need for self-resourcing in order to resource others (Clutterbuck et al., 2016; Turner & Palmer, 2018). There have therefore been calls for reflective practice and self-care by coaches to mitigate potential the negative effects of coaching practice (e.g., Clutterbuck et al., 2016; Lancer et al., 2016; Passmore et al., 2017). There is substantial empirical evidence that suggests a relationship between professionals' job performance and their satisfaction with their life and job (e.g., Judge et al., 2001). Moreover, research findings indicate an association between personal satisfaction on the part of psychotherapists and the working alliance between the therapist and their patients (Nissen-Lie et al., 2013). Taking into consideration that meta-analytical findings indicate that a high-quality working alliance between coach and coachee relates positively to coaching outcome (Graßmann et al., 2020), one can therefore assume that a satisfied coach delivers better coaching than an unsatisfied coach.

According to the results of a recent survey by Passmore and colleagues (2017), coaching supervision is among the most popular methods of reflective practice among European coaches. Passmore et al. define coaching supervision as: "The process that occurs when a coach brings their work to a supervisor in order to be supported, reflective and engage in collaborative learning for their personal development for the benefit of themself, their clients and their organisational clients" (p. 15). A supervisor helps the coach to explore "tricky situations" previously encountered with coachees, discuss different perspectives on potentially difficult or challenging coachees, and gain support for the potentially emotional impact that coaching practice might have on them (Clutterbuck et al., 2016, p. 6). Others describe coaching supervision as an activity that helps coaches to re-source themselves due to its developmental, resourcing, and qualitative functions (Hawkins, 2018; Hawkins & Smith, 2013; Hawkins & Turner, 2017). First experimental findings corroborate that coaches benefit from coaching supervision, in other words, using supervision counterbalanced the negative

effects of coaching practice (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2018). However, there is no research to date on the experienced mental strain and life satisfaction of workplace coaches and how both concepts relate to the use of supervision.

3 Aims and Summary of Studies

This cumulative dissertation comprises three studies that are presented in this section. The studies built directly upon the theoretical background outlined above and aim to address gaps in prior research. Firstly, this dissertation attempts to examine the relevance of goal activities in workplace coaching by summarizing previous empirical research on the frequency of using goal activities in workplace coaching and its effects on coaching outcome. Secondly, I strive to present initial quantitative insights into exploration practices in workplace coaching and how reported exploration practices relate to coaches' backgrounds. Thirdly, the experienced mental strain, life satisfaction, and use of supervision by workplace coaches is investigated. Figure 2 displays the examined variables of each study in an overarching framework of input, process, output, and contextual factors of coaching (e.g., Greif, 2012; Myers, 2017). The full-length manuscripts of the three conducted studies are presented in section 7.

3.1 Study 1

Goals are a central feature of coaching literature and practice (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). Among practitioners and scholars, however, the use of goals in coaching is controversial (e.g., Grant, 2012). Study 1 reports the findings of a systematic literature review that was conducted on goal activities in workplace coaching. In total, 2,999 records were identified through database searching and other sources (e.g., citation chaining). Twenty-four studies were included in the final synthesis. The findings of the included empirical studies are summarized in regard to (a) how frequently coaches use goal activities in their coaching practice, (b) the factors that influence the frequency of using goal activities in coaching practice,

Figure 2

Overview of the Examined Variables of Study 1-3
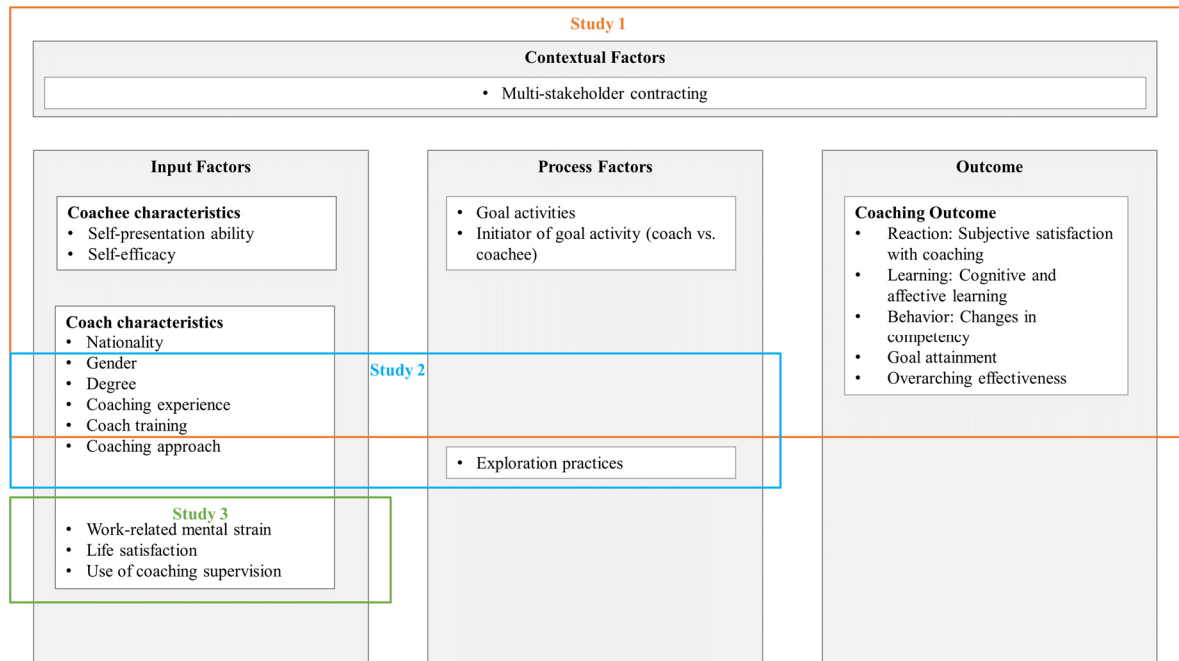
(c) the relationship between using goal activities and coaching outcome, and (d) which factors impact upon the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome. In the extant research, working with goals is conceptualized as goal setting, setting action/development plans, a goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee, and other goal activities (e.g., following a goal-focused coaching approach). Goal setting is the most frequently researched goal activity in the extant research. Coaches indicated applying goal activities rather frequently, whereas former coachees reported less frequently that coaches used goal activities. The findings of the included studies suggest that coaches' regional and educational background might affect how frequently they use goal setting in their coaching practice. Regarding the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome, the findings were inconclusive. Namely, while six study findings indicated a positive relationship between working with goals and coaching outcome, five studies reported empirical support for only partly positive associations, and four studies reported no significant link. Previous research examined the coachee's self-presentation ability and self-efficacy, whether the coach or the

coachee initiated the goal behavior, and the contextual factors (e.g., involvement of organizational stakeholders) as moderators of the relationship between working with goals and coaching outcome. Based on these findings, it seems that coaches should adopt more nuanced perspectives on how to work with goals in workplace coaching.

3.2 Study 2

There is a lack of knowledge on how coaches proceed during their usual coaching practice. Empirical findings suggest that coach behavior at the beginning of coaching engagements is particularly important to the whole coaching process and coaching outcome (e.g., Ianiro et al., 2013; Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). Building on findings from a preceding interview study (Diermann et al., under review), a set of 60 items on coaching practices that coaches might use during the initial exploration of coaching was created. An online survey on initial exploration practices in workplace coaching was conducted with 218 experienced German-speaking coaching practitioners. Coaches reported having diverse academic backgrounds and were representative of the coaching market. The study participants were instructed to rate how frequently they personally utilize certain methods (e.g., imagination techniques) and address specific topics described in the items (e.g., coachee's current family situation) during the initial exploration of a usual coaching engagement. To identify the underlying dimensions of initial exploration practices in workplace coaching, the data were analyzed using principal component analysis. The results revealed five dimensions of coaches' initial exploration practices: Exploration of the coachee's (1) professional context and (2) personal context, use of (3) standardized methods and (4) active and creative methods, and (5) clarification of the coachee's coaching issues and goals. The majority of survey participants indicated that they frequently explore their coachee's coaching issues and goals as well as their coachee's professional and personal contexts during the initial exploration of workplace coaching. By contrast, coaches reported using standardized methods only rarely. The frequency of using

active and creative methods varied across the surveyed coaches. Additionally, it was analyzed whether differences in reported exploration practices are explained by coaches' gender, coaching experience, educational background, and preference for certain coaching approaches. While no significant predictors of the exploration of the coachee's personal context emerged, coach variables significantly accounted for the variance ($.12 \leq R^2 \leq .23$) of the remaining components, that is, clarification of coaching issues and goals, the exploration of the coachee's professional context, using active and creative methods, and using standardized methods. Coaching experience, whether the coach completed coach training or holds a degree in social science/education (compared to other academic degrees), and affiliation with specific coaching approaches (psychoanalytic/psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, transactional analysis, and neuro-linguistic programming) emerged as significant predictors of exploration dimensions. The results indicate that the educational background and the amount of coaching experience showed a rather weak association with most reported exploration practices by the surveyed coaches. The findings therefore imply that coaches might not work as diversely as previously suspected.

3.3 Study 3

Previous research indicates that the life satisfaction of individuals in human-services professions is positively related to the quality of their work (e.g., Nissen-Lie et al., 2013). Researchers therefore examined the life satisfaction of various professional helpers (e.g., psychotherapists, social workers). Coaches are also professional helpers who might encounter "tricky" or burdensome situations during coaching sessions. Coaches frequently experience negative effects from coaching that negatively impact upon their well-being (Graßmann et al., 2019; Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). It has thus been argued that coaches should engage in reflective practice to mitigate potential negative effects from their coaching practice, for example, by using coaching supervision (e.g., Clutterbuck et al., 2016). However, there is a

dearth of research on how much work-related mental strain coaches perceive, how satisfied they are with their lives, and whether their mental strain and life satisfaction relate to using supervision. In order to address this research gap, an online survey with 110 experienced workplace coaches from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland was conducted. The results indicate that coaches perceived less mental strain (operationalized by using the Irritation Scale; Mohr, Rigotti, & Müller, 2005) and were more satisfied with both their job and leisure time (operationalized by using the Life Satisfaction Questionnaire; Fahrenberg et al., 2000) compared to population norms of the German working population (Fahrenberg et al., 2000; Mohr, Müller, & Rigotti, 2005). An interaction effect was found between coaches' work-related mental strain and using supervision when it comes to predicting job satisfaction. More specifically, when the mental strain experienced by coaches was high, using supervision had a buffering effect on coaches' reported job satisfaction. Coaching supervision therefore appeared to be an efficient strategy of coaches' reflective practice. The findings imply that coaches can benefit substantially from coaching supervision, particularly when they experience elevated levels of work-related mental strain. The results emphasize the importance of the resourcing function of coaching supervision that has been postulated in previous research (e.g., Hawkins & Smith, 2013).

4 General Discussion

The coaching industry currently lacks universally accepted standards and knowledge of applied coaching practices among coaches (e.g., Gettman et al., 2019; Stober & Parry, 2005; Vandaveer et al., 2016). Potential coachees and organizations are faced with the challenge of selecting "good" coaches (e.g., Lai & Palmer, 2019). Buyers of coaching services are often obliged to make their selection based only on information on the background and training of coaches (e.g., Bachkirova et al., 2015). This dissertation aims to take further steps towards the professionalization of coaching by investigating (a) the application of specific coaching

practices (i.e., working with goals, Study 1; initial exploration practices, Study 2), and (b) how much work-related mental strain coaches endure, how satisfied coaches are with their job, and how this relates to using supervision (Study 3). Based on the findings, one can derive implications that are relevant for coaches, potential or current coachees, coach commissioners, and providers of coach training programs. First, the theoretical and practical implications of the findings for different stakeholders are summarized and discussed. Second, a critical appraisal of the strengths and limitations of the conducted studies is provided. Lastly, suggestions for future research are derived.

4.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Considering the large amount of literature on the usefulness of working with goals in coaching (e.g., Ellam & Palmer, 2006; Grant, 2012; Jinks & Dexter, 2012; Johnston, 2005; Nowack, 2017), the question that arose was whether this claim of coaching success by (simply) using goal activities is supported by empirical findings. Even though working with goals has been conceptualized in various ways beyond goal setting in previous research (e.g., setting action/development plans, goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee), goal setting is by far the most frequently researched goal activity. Other goal activities have thus been rather neglected in the extant research. In addition, it was a surprising finding that only a rather small research base exists that empirically examined the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome (i.e., a total of 15 studies of which five were interview studies). Moreover, the extant findings on the relationship between working with goals and coaching outcome were inconsistent, and studies rarely reported variables that might have impacted upon the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcomes. The systematic review of the literature revealed a dearth of research, especially in regard to the influence of contextual factors of coaching that might impact upon the relationship. For coaching practitioners, the scarcity of empirical evidence supporting the notion that working

with goals leads to a better coaching outcome suggests that they might consider using goal activities more cautiously and critically. It appears as though following, for example, a SMART goal setting protocol might be one way of practicing coaching, though not the only way. On the contrary, for example, Cavanagh (2016) discusses that we live in an unstable and complex world that is characterized by bounded non-linearity in which coaching models that assume linear cause and effect (e.g., SMART goal setting) might encounter limitations. Cavanagh's description is in accordance with the commonly used acronym *VUCA* to specify the challenges presented by the current working world (i.e., volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity; e.g., Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Scholars and practitioners argue that work is becoming increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, and that this also has consequences for coaching practice (e.g., Giernalczyk & Möller, 2019; Schermuly, 2019). Simple problems in a slowly changing environment are supposedly tackled well using SMART (i.e., linear) goal setting models (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). By contrast, when coachees are confronted with the challenges of a dynamic and complex environment in their daily work (i.e., working in a VUCA environment), setting specific and concrete goals might not be a very helpful coaching technique when one considers that defined goals could soon be outdated. Simplistic assumptions about the role of goals in coaching and a reliance or overreliance on goal setting might even hinder coaching effectiveness (e.g., David et al., 2016; Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015). Even though many definitions of coaching co-exist, most of them have in common that they describe coaching as a *goal*-focused development intervention or as a process to facilitate the coachee's *goal attainment* (e.g., Grant et al., 2010; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015; Theeboom et al., 2014). However, seeing that there is no unanimity in the empirical findings indicating that working with goals is beneficial and that scholars have discussed that its success on coaching outcome might depend on contextual factors (e.g., complexity of the coachee's work environment), one may argue whether it is advisable to attribute such a prominent and uncritical role to goals within definitions of

coaching. Coaching practitioners might interpret this as an indication that (a) goal setting is a compulsory coaching practice (e.g., SMART goal setting as a "default model"; Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017, p. 232), or that (b) goal attainment is a necessary outcome of successful coaching (e.g., Schermuly, 2018). Researchers should therefore consider adapting definitions of coaching by indicating that focusing on goals might be one possible approach to coaching and that goal attainment is a potential but not necessary coaching outcome. Concerning coach training programs, training providers should ensure that coaches-in-training develop a nuanced understanding of using goals in coaching. For instance, trainers could facilitate discussions among coaches-in-training on how and when to work with various goal models in coaching during coach training curriculums. More precisely, they should address considerations of what constitutes an appropriate approach to goal setting, depending, for example, on the organizational environment and context of the specific coachee (e.g., Bachkirova et al., 2017; Cavanagh, 2016; Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). From the perspective of potential coachees and HR professionals, the findings indicate that they might want to discover more about the coach's goal focus and evaluate how the coach's approach fits the dynamics and structures of the specific work environment and organization before commissioning their coaching services.

In Study 2, five dimensions of coaching practices that coaches apply during the initial exploration emerged: Exploration of the coachee's (1) professional context and (2) personal context, use of (3) standardized methods and (4) active and creative methods, and (5) clarification of the coachee's coaching issues and goals. Diermann et al. (under review, p. 5) define the initial exploration of workplace coaching as the "activities that coaches engage in to systematically gather and process relevant information about coachees, their situation and organizational context, with the purpose of generating a preliminary 'diagnosis' and deducing appropriate interventions". Based on the results of Study 2, the definition of initial exploration in workplace coaching can be adapted as:

Activities (i.e., utilizing standardized methods, using active and creative methods,

clarifying coaching issues and goals) that coaches engage in to gather and process

relevant information about their coachees' professional and personal contexts and

coaching issues and goals with the purpose of generating a preliminary 'diagnosis' and

deducing appropriate interventions.

The resulting framework of dimensions of exploration practices unravels some of the mystery

of coaching practice (e.g., Bono et al., 2009). The findings suggest that there might to some

extent be a shared viewpoint among German-speaking coaches about how the initial

exploration of coaching is typically conducted – or how it is *supposed* to be conducted from

the coach's perspective. The finding therefore challenges the understanding of the coaching

process as a potentially highly diverse process influenced by the coaches' diverse

backgrounds (Bachkirova et al., 2015). This might indicate that coaches do not work as

diversely as previously suspected and that the coaching industry is maturing (Bastian, 2015).

The resulting framework of exploration practices can be used as a checklist for reflection on

coaches' own coaching practices during the initial exploration. Namely, coaches can apply the

framework to find out how they might differ from other practitioners and find potential blind

spots or identify unique features of their practice. The results are also relevant for coachees

and HR professionals. They might now know a little better which coaching behavior can be

expected from coaches during the initial coaching session(s). In addition, considering that the

coaches' background only accounts for variance in some aspects of exploration practices and

some coach characteristics did not have any significant effects (e.g., coach's gender, academic

degree in psychology or business, psychotherapy training), potential coachees and HR

professionals may want to ask coaches directly about how they approach the initial

exploration. For instance, HR professionals could discuss which exploration practices might

(not) be appropriate for the organizational culture (e.g., using standardized tests or active and

creative methods, focusing on the coachee's personal issues if the organization is paying for

the coaching). Regarding coaching education, findings suggest that the variety of exploration practices should be presented and discussed during coach training programs so that coaches-in-training can develop their personal approach to the initial exploration.

Even though previous research suggests that coaches are constantly confronted with negative effects from coaching (e.g., Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019), the findings of Study 3 indicate that coaches experience low work-related mental strain and have a high level of life satisfaction (i.e., concerning their job as coach and leisure time). In addition, using coaching supervision mitigated the relationship between coaches' experienced mental strain and job satisfaction. In other words, even when the work-related mental strain of coaches is high, their job satisfaction was also high when they used supervision. It can therefore be argued that coaching supervision is a successful strategy of coaches' self-care. The findings are highly relevant to the current debates on the usefulness of coaches' reflective practice and coaching supervision (e.g., Graßmann, 2018; Lancer et al., 2016). Coaching practitioners should consider using coaching supervision to maintain a high level of job satisfaction, particularly at times when they experience elevated levels of work-related mental strain. This finding resonates with coaches who advocated regular coaching supervision as good coaching practice (e.g., Clutterbuck et al., 2016). The frequent use of coaching supervision could be promoted in order to encourage the professionalization of coaches. Coaching associations have already realized the potential benefits of coaches' regular use of coaching supervision. For instance, the International Coach Federation states on its website that they support coaching supervision for coach practitioners "as part of their portfolio of continuing professional development activities designed to keep them fit for purpose" (https://coachfederation.org/coaching-supervision). I argue that coaches should not only *use* supervision but also *advertise* that they regularly do so as best practice (e.g., on their website or when applying for coaching engagements). From the perspective of coachees and HR professionals, it might be sensible to directly ask the coach whether they use supervision

before selecting them as a coach or adding them to the organization's pool of potential coaches. As Bachkirova et al. (2020) point out, many organizations already demand that the coaches they commission should be in supervision. Providers of coach training programs should integrate reflections and discussions on different possibilities of coaches' reflective practice and self-care into the training curriculum and might even consider making supervision mandatory during coach training. This might nudge coaches-in-training towards the regular use of supervision from the beginning of their coaching practice.

Taken together, the results of Study 1 and 2 imply that certain techniques are used frequently in workplace coaching. More specifically, the results from the primary studies summarized in Study 1 indicate that coaches frequently work with goals during coaching. The majority of survey participants in Study 2 also reported that they often or always explore their coachee's issues and goals as well as both the personal and professional contexts of the coachee during the initial exploration. The findings of Study 2 do not prove that there is only one way in which the initial exploration of workplace coaching is typically practiced but rather that coaches in the study tended to agree on how the initial exploration is, from their point of view, typically practiced. The findings might therefore indicate that there exists a mutual understanding among coaches about how to conduct workplace coaching, despite the dearth of standardization of practices within the coaching industry. This could suggest that, considering the relative newness of the field of coaching, potential differences among coaches may not yet have been codified (Bachkirova et al., 2015). By contrast, it might imply that differences among coaches with various backgrounds have been disappearing over time because the coaching industry is already maturing (e.g., through coaches' access to similar information by means of technology) and coaches might work less diversely than previously suspected (Bastian, 2015).

4.2 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

This dissertation aims to shed light on different aspects of coaching practice that have been neglected in coaching research. A comprehensive systematic literature review and two online surveys with coaching practitioners ($N = 218$, Study 2; $N = 110$, Study 3) were conducted. Study 1 addresses a previously postulated research gap (e.g., Bozer & Jones, 2018) by summarizing the findings of extant (both quantitative and qualitative) empirical studies on working with goals in workplace coaching. The participants of both Study 2 and 3 were experienced coaching practitioners (i.e., with an average of 11.2 and 13.7 years of coaching experience, respectively) from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, and they were representative of the German coaching market (Middendorf, 2018; Passmore et al., 2018). The findings are therefore highly relevant for the coaching industry as they are more applicable than findings of studies conducted with student samples (Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015; Sonesh, Coultas, & Marlow et al., 2015). Furthermore, considering that the use of exploration practices in coaching is a topic that has till now been under-researched, the items used in Study 2 were specifically developed for the survey, based on the findings of an extensive preceding interview study (Diermann et al., under review). The resulting framework of exploration practices in workplace coaching can be used by researchers to operationalize exploration practices in future studies and by coaches in order to reflect on their coaching practice. The qualitative feedback that coaches provided after participating in the study strongly suggests that some participants found the questionnaire a useful checklist for describing and reflecting on their practice (e.g., "Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on my exploration practices!"). In Study 3, standardized, reliable, and validated questionnaires were used to operationalize coaches' work-related mental strain (operationalized with the Irritation Scale by Mohr, Rigotti, & Müller, 2005) and life satisfaction (operationalized with the Life Satisfaction Questionnaire by Fahrenberg et al., 2000). Comparisons with population norms of the German working population were therefore

possible. To the best of my knowledge, Study 2 and 3 present the first quantitative empirical work on the exploration practices, the experienced work-related mental strain, and the life satisfaction of workplace coaches.

Nonetheless, the chosen study designs and methods of the conducted studies entail limitations. Cross-sectional studies are described as an essential "starting point for resolving problems of theory" in coaching research (Stober & Parry, 2005, p. 17) and if one wishes to investigate a large sample of coaches who are representative of the coaching industry, a quantitative survey is the best method for obtaining a large amount of information from this rather large sample. Analyses and implications are however limited in comparison to those of longitudinal study designs. For instance, concerning Study 3, due to the correlational study design, it is unclear whether more work-related mental strain leads to coaches' lower job satisfaction or whether coaches who are more satisfied with their job experience less work-related mental strain. More specifically, as displayed in Figure 2, in Study 3, the coaches' experienced work-related mental strain, life satisfaction, and use of supervision were all treated as input factors, that is, all variables were measured at the same time by the same person (i.e., the coach). However, one could argue that coaches' use of supervision is a coaching process variable and that coaches' experienced mental strain and life satisfaction are outcome measures of coaching (e.g., Greif, 2012). This is particularly critical considering that current research suggests that, for example, an individual's well-being is a dynamic construct that changes over time and fluctuates within a person (e.g., Sonnentag, 2015), and thus the same might apply to the constructs of mental strain and life satisfaction. A promising study design could implement a diary study (e.g., Ohly et al., 2010) of coaches' experienced work-related mental strain, life satisfaction, and frequency of using coaching supervision over a longer period of time in order to examine whether coaches' ratings of mental strain and life satisfaction fluctuate and how the ratings relate to (e.g., the frequency of using) coaching supervision.

In Study 2 and 3, only the perspective of coaches was examined. The risk of common methods bias therefore exists. More precisely, the self-reports of coaches might be biased, for example, due to social desirability (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2003). Accordingly, concerning the results of Study 3, coaches might have felt obliged to describe being satisfied with their lives and experiencing low mental strain since they help others professionally. Regarding the findings of Study 2, it is unclear whether coaches reported how they *actually* proceed during the initial exploration of coaching or whether they might have reported their *ideal* understanding of exploration practices. In addition, it has been previously discussed that some coaches might encounter difficulties in describing techniques that they use and the frequency or the extent to which they use them within their usual coaching practice (e.g., Bastian, 2015; Ellam-Dyson & Palmer, 2008; Williams, 2012). Another question that thus remains unanswered is whether coaches and coachees experience the coaches' use of exploration practices similarly. Previous research suggests that the experiences of the coaching process from the perspectives of coaches and coachees might indeed differ significantly from each other (e.g., Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015; Graßmann, 2018; Will et al., 2016; Williams, 2012). Future studies that gather large-scale data on exploration practices from the perspective of both coaches *and* coachees are therefore urgently needed. Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2018) even call for the implementation of data source *triangulation*, that is, drawing data from the perspective of the coach *and* the coachee *and* other individuals in the coachee's environment.

Coaching research trails far behind psychotherapy research in terms of the use of behavioral data and it lacks methods that are suitable for uncovering processes within the coaching interaction (e.g., Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015; Jordan & Kauffeld, 2020). To overcome the limitations (e.g., getting information that is colored by a distinctive viewpoint) that occur when using subjective measures (i.e., self-ratings by coach or coachee), the current research should be further extended by gathering behavioral data. For instance, since 2015,

the "Kasseler Coaching-Studie" (see http://t1p.de/kasseler-coachingstudie) aims to obtain data from real one-on-one workplace coaching engagements (i.e., pre- and post-coaching questionnaires from the coach and the coachee perspectives, a follow-up questionnaire from the coachee perspective that is filled out six months after the coaching is completed, *and* audio recordings of all conducted coaching sessions). To recruit workplace coaches for participation, the department of Theory and Methodology of Counselling at the University of Kassel invited coaches who were interested in study participation to workshops on coaching research and practice, and offered the study participants individual feedback on their coaching (e.g., feedback on their operationalized psychodynamic diagnostics; Arbeitskreis zur Operationalisierung Psychodynamischer Diagnostik, 2014; Benecke & Möller, 2013). At present, thorough data (i.e., duly completed questionnaires and available recordings of all conducted coaching sessions) are available for 16 completed coaching engagements. The data size illustrates the difficulties of collecting such data.

There are numerous reasons for coaching practitioners to participate in coaching research, for example, the benefits they assume will derive from research, but equally, there are numerous reasons for them *not* to participate, for example, the expected effort and inconvenience associated with participation and the fear of potential exposure of coaching inefficacy (Hinn & Kotte, manuscript in preparation). Observational techniques strongly depend on the goodwill of coaches and coachees to provide access to recordings of coaching sessions (Myers, 2017). However, coaches and/or coachees might be apprehensive of the potential intrusion of research into the intimate environment between coach and coachee (e.g., Kotte et al., 2017). Scholars report similar challenges in psychotherapy research. Gómez et al. (2017) describe the endeavors needed to persuade psychotherapists to participate in observational studies. They refer to therapists who report being concerned that their patients will not want to be observed by others (i.e., researchers) and who claim that, for ethical reasons, their therapeutic approach is incompatible with recording therapy sessions. The

findings of the survey conducted by Hinn and Kotte (in preparation) indicate that, in comparison to psychotherapists, coaches are *even more* reluctant to offer audio recordings of their coaching sessions.

In addition, in comparison to questionnaires, observational techniques are much more complex and demanding (e.g., time-consuming) to apply (e.g., McLeod, 2003). Namely, it is not only necessary to collect recordings of real coaching sessions but also to construct a rating manual, conduct training courses for observers, and check the performance of observers at regular intervals (i.e., assess the degree of agreement between observers). Furthermore, observational material gives insufficient access to internal processes occurring in either the coach or the coachee that might also be of interest of researchers (McLeod, 2003). Nonetheless, objective ratings should be conducted by trained external observers concerning, for example, coaches' use of goal activities and exploration behavior. In the course of a master's thesis (Rinne, 2020), a first pilot study was carried out on observer-based ratings of the exploration practices during 20 initial coaching sessions (total material of 26 hours) conducted by seven experienced workplace coaches who participated in the "Kasseler Coaching-Studie". The findings suggest that coaches focused on the exploration of the coachee's coaching issues and professional context, and that they predominantly used questioning techniques, paraphrasing, and the discussion of coaches' working hypotheses during the initial exploration.

In order to find out more about the coaching process, other coach behaviors besides the exploration practices and goal activities used by coaches should be explored through analyses of behavioral data. For instance, in psychotherapy research, a reliable and valid measure of operationalization of therapist behavior that relates to therapy success (e.g., Anderson et al., 2016) is the *Facilitative Interpersonal Skill performance test and rating manual* (*FIS*, Anderson et al., 2018). Facilitative interpersonal skills (i.e., verbal fluency, hope and positive expectations, persuasiveness, emotional expression, empathy, alliance bond capacity, alliance

rupture-repair responsiveness, and warmth, acceptance, and understanding) are described as a core set of skills used by helping professionals to initiate change (Anderson et al., 2018). As previously argued (e.g., Bachkirova et al., 2015; Möller & Kotte, 2011; Möller & Kotte, 2018), it is worthwhile to adapt reliable measures from psychotherapy research to coaching research. First empirical work on constructing and validating rating manuals of interpersonal coaching skills (Norwig, 2020) and coaching success factors (Fenner, 2019; Richter, 2019) are promising and should be continued in the future.

Further fruitful future research could be conducted by manipulating coaches' application of (different) goal activities and exploration practices, that is, by implementing (quasi-) experimental design studies. This might however be challenging to accomplish. Taking into account typical coachees, namely, busy and well-paid executives, one difficulty that affects research in applied settings such as coaching research is a high dropout rate. Enticing incentives for coachees to participate in extensive coaching research studies are hard to find (e.g., Ellam-Dyson & Palmer, 2008). Furthermore, when conducting coaching studies in "real-world settings", it is extremely difficult and often unethical to randomly assign participants to intervention or control conditions (Blackman et al., 2016; Grant et al., 2010). For instance, participants assigned to the control group might miss the opportunity to be promoted in comparison to participants of the intervention group who have already received coaching (Ellam-Dyson & Palmer, 2008). Organizations may also be reluctant to fund coaching embedded in research if it implies long time frames (e.g., because of implemented waiting control groups; Blackman et al., 2016).

In addition, scholars who previously conducted rigorous (quasi-)experimental coaching studies have discussed that coaches might either intuitively not strictly employ only one coaching approach as instructed (Williams, 2012) or else show compensatory behavior (i.e., overly using another practice) because they feel guilty for not using a certain technique that they define as a key element of their coaching practice (Scoular & Linley, 2006). Data might

therefore be distorted. It has been argued that coaches aim to use the approach(es) best suited to the coachee and that this may often involve utilizing a *mix* of techniques and strategies (e.g., Ellam-Dyson & Palmer, 2008). This is in line with research on therapist treatment adherence in psychotherapy. For instance, using the Q-sort technique (Jones, 2000), researchers repeatedly found that in naturalistic settings, clinical practitioners often draw on a diverse range of interventions from various schools of thought when conducting psychotherapy (e.g., Ablon & Jones, 1998; Ablon et al., 2006). Other study findings confirm that, across different approaches, a relatively low percentage of interventions in therapy sessions are in fact treatment-specific (e.g., Tschuschke et al., 2015). More specifically, Tschuschke and colleagues found that, on average, nonspecific and common intervention techniques are more often used by psychotherapists than interventions specifically from the therapist's own approach or else interventions specifically from other therapy approaches than the therapist's own approach. Considering that the degree to which therapists adhere to the treatment protocol merely accounts for the variance in treatment outcome (e.g., Webb et al., 2010), it has however been critically questioned "whether psychotherapists' pursuit to adhere, rigidly, to a treatment protocol is a useful endeavor" (e.g., Owen et al., 2015, p. 322). It is therefore probably neither realistic to assume nor a desirable state to attain that coaches use only one specific technique or approach in real coaching settings. The interpretation of findings is thus also limited if a rigorous experimental study design is realized, for example, by using recently trained student "coaches" who coach fellow students. On the one hand, there might be a lower dropout rate among coachees, fewer ethical issues to consider, and a higher adherence to a certain approach taken by the coach, given that they have not (yet) developed their own coaching approach. On the other hand, these studies provide only limited implications due to the rather unrealistic coaching setting and unrepresentative samples of both coaches and coachees (Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015).

Given that the aim of the presented studies was not to investigate the effectiveness of workplace coaching, coaching outcome measures were not included and it was therefore not possible to test the relationship between coaching outcome (e.g., coachees' satisfaction with coaching or goal attainment) and coaches' work-related mental strain, life satisfaction, or applied initial exploration practices. Future research may want to investigate these relationships in a longitudinal study design. For instance, it would be interesting to compare coaches' exploration practices at the beginning sessions of the coaching process of successful coaching engagements (i.e., high outcome ratings after coaching, e.g., high goal attainment of coachee) to unsuccessful coaching engagements (i.e., low outcome ratings after coaching, e.g., low goal attainment of coachee).

Additionally, the diary study suggested above could be realized over the course of one coaching engagement. For instance, researchers could ask the coach to fill out questionnaires immediately after each coaching session with the relevant coachee and examine how their use of supervision and (potentially fluctuating) experienced mental strain and life satisfaction relate to coaching outcome (e.g., coachee's satisfaction with the coaching). However, it should be noted that scholars have also discussed the potential downsides of diary studies. More specifically, not only is the burden (i.e., frequent repeated measurement) that diary studies place on participants criticized (e.g., Gabriel et al., 2019) but the credibility of findings using diary study designs is also somewhat questionable. Namely, recent research indicates the possibility of distorted data (e.g., systematic effects of selective/non-exhaustive reporting of incidents) due to deviant reporting behavior by study participants (e.g., deliberately not reporting relevant incidents to avoid follow-up questions and thereby reduce the workload of study participation; Gochmann et al., 2020).

Potential limitations aside, the suggestions for future studies described above might provide further insights into the relationship between specific exploration practices and coaching outcome as well as the stability (vs. potential fluctuation) of coaches' experienced

mental strain and life satisfaction and how this relates to coachee's coaching outcome. In addition to this, future studies should investigate moderating factors that impact upon the relationship between using certain coaching practices (e.g., working with goals, initial exploration practices) and coaching outcome. For instance, the extent of the organizational embeddedness of the coaching might affect not only which coaching practices are utilized but also how the use of certain techniques relates to coaching outcome.

The instruction for study participants in Study 2 was to describe their usual coaching practices utilized during the initial exploration since the study's focus was on coaching practices used at the beginning of the coaching process only. In line with others (e.g., Will et al., 2016), I argue that to answer the question of how coaching works and to gain a deeper understanding about what is happening in coaching, we need to zoom in on the process of coaching and analyze single phases as a first step. This is however a rather artificial division of the coaching process. In fact, some participants in Study 2 provided qualitative feedback indicating that they were unsure whether they understood correctly what was meant by "initial exploration", despite the definition that was given at the beginning of the survey (e.g., "I am not sure what exactly you mean by 'initial exploration', i.e. the beginning of a coaching process. I work in different settings, each of which requires a different approach. For example, I often conduct discussions on goal agreements with the coachee and his/her supervisor. Do you understand this to be the beginning of the coaching process?"). Research should thus make it even clearer to the study participants how the stages of coaching are defined and differentiated from each other. Future studies should be extended to other stages of the coaching process and eventually investigate coaching practices during all phases of the coaching process.

In addition to this, it has been argued that coaches custom-tailor their approach to the coachee (e.g., Bozer & Jones, 2018; Clutterbuck, 2010). This was not portrayed well through the instruction to report the coach's *usual* initial exploration practices. The qualitative

feedback from some study participants indicated that they experienced difficulties when being instructed to specify the average number of sessions a usual coaching process comprises (e.g., "highly variable", "it's not possible to generalize about this", "there is no standard") or to give average ratings across the coaching processes that they conduct with their coachees (e.g., "I found it very difficult to answer quantitative questions about my *typical* coaching processes. My coaching processes are very different from one another. They range from individual sessions to intensive support over many months."). This is in line with the findings of Bachkirova et al. (2015) who have instructed coaches to assess items as "characteristic" or "uncharacteristic" when describing a typical (mid-engagement) coaching session. They report that some study participants gave feedback about feeling discomfort with this instruction because they felt that some items might be characteristic in some coaching sessions and uncharacteristic in others. In order to avoid average ratings when describing "typical" coaching interventions, future studies could ask coaches about the applied initial exploration practices during their *last* coaching engagement. However, this does not solve the problem of potential differences in the coach's exploration practices across coaching engagements. In addition, when asking coaches to retrospectively report their behavior during specific coaching sessions, the data might suffer from coaches' hindsight bias. More specifically, people tend to overestimate how accurately they can recall past events (see, for example, Arkes et al., 1988) and therefore, coaches' (flawed) memories may influence the data collected in retrospective study designs. Furthermore, the question arises whether it is worthwhile to ask coaches about the frequency with which they have engaged in certain practices during possibly only one coaching session. The survey should therefore be adapted to ask about the *intensity* with which certain practices were utilized and topics were addressed during the initial exploration of their last coaching process or, in accordance with Bachkirova et al. (2015), how *characteristic* (vs. uncharacteristic) coaches find the items in describing the initial exploration practices used during that specific coaching engagement.

The participation in the surveys was voluntary. The possibility of a selection bias on the part of the participants in the studies cannot be ruled out. Given that the number of online surveys is increasing, practitioners with high workloads often refuse to answer them (Gómez et al., 2017). As a result, samples may not accurately represent practitioners as a whole but only those who are willing to respond. This concerns both Study 2 and 3 as it is possible that, for example, only coaches who can reflect well on their coaching practices (Study 2) and who are less mentally strained and rather satisfied with their lives (Study 3) participated in the surveys. In addition to this, the studies were conducted only with German-speaking coaches. The findings should be compared to surveys conducted with coaches from other countries, considering that research suggests that coaches' regional background or nationality impacts upon their preference for using certain coaching practices (e.g., David et al., 2014; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2019) and the frequency with which they use coaching supervision (e.g., Hawkins & Turner, 2017; Passmore et al., 2018).

Lastly, considering the current global crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it should be noted that the findings on coaches' work-related mental strain, satisfaction with their job and especially their financial situation and security might now differ from those reported in Study 3. The majority of study participants indicated that they were self-employed (i.e., 75%). Individuals working in private practice experience more economic uncertainty in general (e.g., Cushway & Tyler, 1996). Even back in 2018, when the data were collected, coaches reported significantly lower satisfaction with their financial security and provision for retirement than the German working population. The current situation causes a tremendous amount of job insecurity. More precisely, because of the COVID-19 crisis, "many employers have turned to furloughing or laying off employees to stay afloat" (Rudolph et al., 2020, p. 25). It is very likely that, during the last few months and for the foreseeable future, coaches had to and will have to endure a loss of coaching clients due to budget cuts or redundancies made in organizations. The current economic situation therefore probably impacts upon

coaches' work-related mental strain and satisfaction with their job and their financial security. It might thus be reasonable to replicate the study under current and future conditions.

5 Conclusion

Unlike Alice, who eventually wakes up and realizes that her adventures in Wonderland were just a dream, the adventures of *Coaching Wonderland* are indeed happening in the here and now and affect coaching practitioners, their coachees, and organizations every day. Coaching research advances the professionalization of coaching by revealing what has been previously hidden. This dissertation contributes to the current research base of workplace coaching by investigating the relevance of goal activities in coaching, the nature of coaches' initial exploration practices and how coach characteristics impact upon their use, and coaches' mental strain and life satisfaction. In summary, coaching research is still at a stage where many questions remain unanswered. However, based on the findings of this dissertation, new directions for future research have emerged.

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7 Manuscripts of Studies

Manuscripts of the three conducted studies are presented here. Manuscripts are formatted in accordance with the applicable journal guidelines.

The manuscript of *Study 1* ("Of SMART, GROW and goals gone wild: A systematic literature review on the relevance of goal activities in workplace coaching") by Alessa A. Müller and Silja Kotte has been published in *International Coaching Psychology Review, 15*(2), 69–97.

The manuscript of *Study 2* ("Constructing a full picture of the coaching client: Coaching practices during the initial exploration in workplace coaching and how they relate to coach characteristics") by Alessa A. Müller, Silja Kotte, Isabell Diermann, and Heidi Möller has been submitted for publication in August 2020.

The version of record of the manuscript of *Study 3* ("Coach and no regrets about it: On the life satisfaction, work-related mental strain, and use of supervision of workplace coaches") by Alessa A. Müller, Silja Kotte, and Heidi Möller has been published and is available in *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, published online on July 2, 2019,
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17521882.2019.1636841.

7.1 Study 1: "Of SMART, GROW and goals gone wild: A systematic literature review on the relevance of goal activities in workplace coaching"

Abstract

Goals are posited to play an important role in coaching. However, concerns have been raised about neglecting potential pitfalls of goal-focused coaching practice. Therefore, we investigate the occurrence of goal activities in workplace coaching and the association with coaching outcomes. We conducted a systematic literature review. We synthesised findings of 24 (quantitative and qualitative) empirical studies. Previously researched goal activities encompass goal setting, setting action/development plans and a goal-focused coach-coachee relationship. Coaches report to work with goals frequently, while coachees report this to occur less. Several studies suggest a positive relationship between goal activities and coaching outcomes, while other studies report no significant association. This lack of association seems to relate to both study design and chosen outcome measures. Initial findings point to possible moderating variables (e.g. coachee characteristics, initiator of goal activity) and potential challenges of involving organisational stakeholders in goal activities.

The scarcity of empirical research stands in contrast to the prominent role of goals in the coaching literature. Goal activities take a wide range of different forms in practice and research. Inconclusive findings on the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcomes call for research on influencing factors, particularly contextual factors.

Keywords: Goal Activities, Goal Setting Theory, Workplace Coaching, Outcome, Input Factors, Process Factors, Contextual Factors, Systematic Literature Review.

Introduction

Since the 1950s, goal setting and its enhancing effects on performance have been extensively studied and widely promoted in organisations (e.g. Drucker, 1954; Grant, 2012; Locke &

Latham, 1990, 2002; Ordóñez, Schweitzer, Galinsky, & Bazerman, 2009). Scholars propose that 'human beings are essentially goal-directed organisms' (e.g. Grant, 2012, p. 153). It is not then by chance that goals have been and currently are a central feature of coaching literature and practice (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). In fact, most definitions specify coaching as a goal-directed intervention and coaching interventions are considered a failure should the coachee's goals not be attained (e.g. Grant, 2006; Schermuly, 2018; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015). Goal setting and goal attainment are regularly described as key components, unquestioned elements or even the central foundation of coaching practice (e.g. Clutterbuck & David, 2016; Cowan, 2013). Many coaching practitioners take goal setting as a given, 'something that coaches [just] do' (David, Clutterbuck, & Megginson, 2014, p. 135). Notwithstanding this, there are ongoing controversial discussions among practitioners and scholars on the use of goals in organisations (e.g. Ordóñez et al., 2009) and coaching (e.g. Grant, 2012, 2018). Much of this discussion has focused on goal setting. Ordóñez and colleagues (2009) dissent from the 'traditional view' and declare that 'goals [have] gone wild' as they postulate that many organisations heavily rely on goal setting while very little attention is given to its potential negative side effects (e.g. neglecting important but non-specified goals). Previous research findings suggest that goal setting in coaching can on the one hand have positive effects on outcomes but might imply potential pitfalls on the other (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). In other words, focusing on specific goals in coaching can be helpful (e.g. in order to increase the coachee's motivation). However, it might equally be a restriction (Jinks & Dexter, 2012). For example, potentially 'hidden' or underlying issues might be neglected, or coach and coachee might blindly focus on the 'wrong' objective due to minimised complexity when setting specific goals right at the beginning of a coaching engagement (e.g. David, Clutterbuck, & Megginson, 2016), while goals might need time to emerge or change over the course of the coaching engagement (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017).

Working with goals in coaching has been conceptualised in various ways beyond goal setting (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017), including for example a goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee. However, the literature is disjointed and an overview of the various ways of working with goals in coaching (i.e. using goal activities) is lacking to date.

Therefore, the current systematic literature review aims to provide a synthesis of previous research findings on (the occurrence of) goal activities that coach and coachee engage in (i.e. goal setting, setting action/development plans, goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee). Moreover, we present findings on factors that impact upon the occurrence of goal activities.

Regarding the influence of working with goals in relation to coaching outcome, scholars have postulated a gap in current research (e.g. Bozer & Jones, 2018). Thus, we seek to synthesise extant empirical studies that examine the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome, that is, coaching effectiveness (e.g. increase in competencies, goal attainment). Furthermore, we summarise findings on variables that might affect the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome.

Given that coaching has grown dramatically in popularity and actual use over the last years (e.g. Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015), the term 'coaching' has been applied to interventions in a wide range of fields (e.g. sports, health and clinical fields), as well as to a wide range of target groups (Grant, 2005). In light of recent calls to take the context of coaching into account (e.g. Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018) and meta-analytic findings on differences in outcomes for different samples of coachees (e.g. Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015), we focus our review on workplace coaching, that is, coaching adults with regard to professional issues. We define workplace coaching in line with Bozer and Jones (2018) as 'a one-to-one custom-tailored, learning and development intervention that uses a collaborative, reflective, goal-focused relationship to achieve professional outcomes that are valued by the coachee' (p. 1).

Goals have been defined in a broad range of ways in the scientific literature (Grant, 2012). We follow Grant (2012, p. 148) when defining goals as 'internal representations of desired states or outcomes'. Hence, goals may differ, for example, in regard to their level of abstraction (e.g. specific vs. abstract) or temporal range (i.e. proximal vs. distal) (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017).

With this systematic literature review, we advance the coaching field by presenting what is currently known (and not known yet) about goal activities in coaching and their impact upon coaching effectiveness. On these grounds, we provide recommendations for future research and deduce evidence-based guidance on goal-focused coaching practice.

Goal Activities in Coaching

Even though the use of goals in organisations is criticised by some (e.g. Ordóñez et al., 2009), goals are a central feature of coaching literature and practice (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). The most prominent goal concepts in coaching encompass goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002), the GROW model (Whitmore, 1992), the goal-related component of the working alliance (Horvath & Greenberg, 1989) between coach and coachee (e.g. de Haan, Grant, Burger, & Eriksson, 2016), and Grant's goal-focused model of coaching (2006, 2012). As a background for our review of the empirical literature, we summarise ubiquitous goal-focused theories and frameworks in the following.

Goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002) – together with its popular applications – has been one of the most influential theories in coaching research and practice (Theeboom, van Vianen, & Beersma, 2017). Based on more than 35 years of empirical research on the relationship between goals and performance, Locke and Latham (1990, 2002) argue that the core to goal achievement lies in its specificity and difficulty level. Put differently, to achieve higher performance, goals should be specific (rather than vague) and challenging. The positive effect of goal setting is supposedly due to focused attention,

encouraged effort, maintained persistence, and the harnessed knowledge and resources of the individual (David et al., 2014). In coaching practice, a ubiquitous application of goal setting theory is SMART goal setting (Clutterbuck & David, 2016), first mentioned by Doran in 1981. Following this model, goals are supposed to be Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic and Time-related. SMART goals are widely advocated for and practised within the coaching industry such that goal setting is often equated with and thereby limited to SMART goals (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017; Grant, 2012).

Another prominent acronym-model of working with goals in coaching is the GROW model (Whitmore, 1992). It encompasses the stages of Goal setting (i.e. setting short- and long-term goals), Reality check (i.e. assessing the current situation), Options (i.e. discussing potential alternatives) and Will or Wrap-Up (i.e. delineating action steps; deciding on what is to be done, when and by whom). These are regarded as the four key steps of a successful coaching process (Whitmore, 1992) and goal setting, the 'G', is seen as the fundamental basis of successful coaching engagements.

Adapted from psychotherapy, working with goals in coaching has also been conceptualised as a goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee. Bordin (1979) proposed that the working alliance between therapist and patient is an important success factor of psychotherapy. The most established measure of his conceptualisation is the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI; Horvath & Greenberg, 1989) which has been transferred to the field of coaching (e.g. de Haan et al., 2016; Graßmann, Schölmerich, & Schermuly, 2019). The WAI comprises three components, one of which is explicitly goal-related, namely, the mutual agreement on goals between coach and coachee. The other two components consist of agreement on required tasks and relational bonding.

Grant (2006, 2012) suggested an integrative model of goal-focused coaching that is closely tied to the concept of self-regulation. Accordingly, the coaches' task is to support their coachees in moving through the cycle of setting a goal, developing a plan of action, putting it

into action, monitoring their performance and adapting their actions to better achieve their goals. More specifically, Grant describes the coach as a facilitator of his or her coachee's goal attainment. After the coachee perceives the need for coaching, the goal selection process starts which is affected by contextual or organisational factors (e.g. system complexity) as well as by the coachee's individual factors (e.g. personal needs). Moderators on the goal selection process stem both from the coachee him- or herself (e.g. level of change readiness) and the coaching session, that is, the coach's knowledge, skills and ability, for example, to support the setting of effective goals and to facilitate action planning. What follows are the final goal choice, deciding on action plans, monitoring the coachee's performance and eventually attainment of the goal(s).

In our review, we define working with goals as a broad range of goal activities, that is, all actions performed by the coach and/or coachee during workplace coaching that concern coaching goals. Or put differently, specific goal-related behaviour that the coach and coachee engage in over the course of the coaching engagement (Kappenberg, 2008). We therefore concentrate on coaching session moderators of Grant's model (2012). This could be, for example, goal setting, setting action/development plans or the goal-focused aspect of the coach-coachee relationship.

Research Questions

While goals enjoy great popularity in coaching research and (supposedly) coaching practice, diverging assessments on the value and risks of goal activity co-exist. The literature on goal activities in coaching lacks integration and scholars identified a research gap concerning the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome (e.g. Bozer & Jones, 2018). We therefore propose the following research questions.

Research question 1a: Which goal activities do coaches and coachees engage in?

Research question 1b: Which factors impact upon the occurrence of goal activities?

Research question 2a: Which relationship emerges between goal activities and coaching outcome?

Research question 2b: Which factors impact upon the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome?

Methods

We decided to conduct a systematic literature review to summarise what we currently know and do not (yet) know about the relevance of goal activities in workplace coaching. A systematic literature review not only integrates previous literature but also identifies the central issues of the addressed question (Briner & Denyer, 2012). Thus, it locates, appraises and synthesises 'the best available evidence relating to a specific research question in order to provide informative and evidence-based answers' (Dickson, Cherry, & Boland, 2017, p. 2).

Literature Search

We searched relevant electronic databases via EBSCO (i.e. Business Source Premier, EconLit, PsychArticles, PsycINFO, Psyndex and OpenDissertation) to find studies using the following search terms: coaching AND (goal* OR target*) NOT (sport* OR clinical). We deliberately did not restrict our search to 'goal setting' in order to capture the broad range of goal activities outlined in the coaching literature. We further searched in coaching-specific peer-reviewed journals in the English and German languages (i.e. Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice; International Coaching Psychology Review; International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring; The Coaching Psychologist; Coaching: Theorie & Praxis), and checked Grant's (2011) compilation of abstracts from articles and theses on coaching. To find unpublished studies, we also sent out requests via mailing-list services of the Academy of Management and the German Psychological Society. Furthermore, based on the results of our search, we conducted a

second systematic search on the following search terms: 'coaching AND working alliance NOT (sport* OR clinical)' in order to ensure that we would include all relevant studies that conceptualise goal activity in terms of the goal component of the working alliance. No further results emerged.

Inclusion Criteria

We defined a thorough protocol following predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. To be eligible for further analysis, studies had to (a) be published as journal articles or so-called *grey literature* (i.e. dissertations, theses, conference proceedings); (b) use the English or German language; (c) be empirical (quantitative and/or qualitative study design); (d) be compatible with our coaching definition, namely, workplace coaching in a formal one-on-one (i.e. coach-coachee) coaching setting; and (e) report on goal activities (e.g. goal setting) applied during workplace coaching (e.g. 'executive' or 'professional' coaching).

Following other scholars (e.g. Bozer & Jones, 2018; Graßmann et al., 2019), we included grey literature in order to maximise study results within the rather young discipline of coaching research and to avoid distortions due to publication bias. Given that some of the most notable empirical research on the coaching process has been carried out in Germany (Bachkirova, Sibley, & Myers, 2015), we included studies in the German language in addition to English publications. As we aimed at summarising extant empirical research findings, we did not include conceptual or discursive papers, opinion pieces or practitioner contributions without empirical data. Given our focus on workplace coaching, studies on types of coaching other than workplace coaching of adults were excluded (e.g. clinical, sports or music coaching). Studies of student samples were only included when coachees were adults (i.e. over 18 years old) and coaching topics were work-related, for example, career coaching. Research on managerial/supervisory coaching (i.e. coaching provided by a supervisor with formal authority over the coachee) or group/team coaching was excluded. Managerial

coaching differs from workplace coaching as it is hierarchical in nature and is therefore more

a component of leadership (e.g. Graßmann et al., 2019). Group/team coaching was excluded

as it deviates from our definition of a one-on-one coaching engagement. Studies that

conceptualised goals only as a dependent variable (i.e. an outcome measure, e.g. goal

attainment) without reporting goal activity measures as an independent variable (i.e. an input

measure, e.g. goal setting) were ruled out. We focused our search on goal activities that the

coach and/or coachee employed during coaching engagements (i.e. coaching session

moderators; Grant, 2012). In other words, we excluded studies that only focus on coachee

characteristics such as coachee goal orientation. Finally, we excluded studies that did not

describe distinctive associations in terms of goal activities to outcomes, but instead reported

overall coaching behaviour or implemented additional interventions besides coaching at the

same time (e.g. 360°-feedback, training *and* coaching). This is because it would not be clear

how the two (or more) interventions individually influenced outcomes or if the multiple

interventions interact in influencing outcomes.

Data Set

Our search of data bases resulted in 2984 studies. After the assessment of titles and abstracts

(i.e. preliminary screening) and the addition of 15 studies from other sources (e.g. through

citation chaining), 135 full texts were retrieved and checked for eligibility as per our inclusion

criteria. As a result, 24 studies were included in the final synthesis.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Studies were assessed by three reviewers, the two authors and a graduate student. A

coding protocol was developed jointly by the research team. Reviewers then screened and

coded each study that met the inclusion criteria. In the case of any discrepancies between

reviewers, a discussion was held until an agreement between all raters was reached. All

studies that were included in the final synthesis are indicated with an * in our list of references.

Results

First, we describe study characteristics, reported goal activities and measured coaching outcomes of the included studies. This is followed by an outline of the findings of studies that reported the occurrence of using different goal activities in coaching (*research question 1a*) and research on factors that might impact upon the occurrence of goal activities (*research question 1b*). We then present the findings of research on the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome (*research question 2a*) and on factors that might impact upon the relationship (*research question 2b*).

Characteristics of Included Studies and Reported Measures

Study Characteristics

Table 1 summarises the characteristics of included studies.

Out of the 24 studies included in our review, 13 studies were quantitative surveys or (quasi-)experimental studies, six were qualitative interview studies, two employed a mixed methods design and three were observational (case) studies. Nine studies concerned the status quo of goal activity behaviour in coaching without assessing coaching outcomes, while 15 studies also included coaching outcome measures. The majority of studies ($n = 21$) employed field rather than student coach samples ($n = 3$). Sample sizes ranged from one participant to 1895 coach-coachee dyads. For those studies that used professional coaches and experience was reported ($n = 13$), it ranged from two to 20 years of work experience as coach. Duration of the researched coaching process varied from one session of 30 minutes to eleven sessions. Goal activities were assessed through the perspective of coaches ($n = 7$), coachees ($n = 6$), both coach and coachees ($n = 4$), or others (e.g. expert raters; $n = 3$). In four studies, goal

activities were manipulated through (quasi-)experimental conditions and therefore not

'assessed'. Fifteen studies were published in peer-reviewed journals, while the other

publications can be categorised as 'grey literature', that is, five dissertations, one master

thesis, two books or book chapters, and one conference proceeding. Most manuscripts ($n =$

20) were written in English, while four were in German. Study participants came from a range

of different countries: USA ($n = 8$), Germany ($n = 6$), UK ($n = 2$), Australia ($n = 1$) and South

Africa ($n = 1$). Four studies encompassed international samples (e.g. participants from UK

and Scandinavia), whereas two primary studies did not mention the nationality of participants.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Reported Goal Activities

Primary studies applied a wide range of conceptualisations and operationalisations of goal

activities, with the majority of studies using self-developed scales rather than standardised

measures. We sorted the goal activities of the included studies into the following four

categories: (a) Goal setting, (b) Setting action or development plans, (c) Goal-focused coach-

coachee-relationship, and (d) Other goal activities.

a) Goal setting

Seven studies operationalise working with goals as goal setting, goal development or goal

clarification. They describe them as activities whereby coach and coachee establish coaching

goals or the coach gives the coachee a clear direction to work toward, partly resorting to

specific underlying models and techniques (e.g. Goal Attainment Scaling, GROW model). In

observational studies, goal setting was rated as one of several success factors in coaching

(Greif, Schmidt, & Thamm, 2010).

b) Setting action or development plans

Three studies considered setting action or development plans. Setting action/development

plans goes beyond goal setting as it also explicitly includes the incorporation of plans for

achieving and implementing these goals. For example, Vandaveer, Lowman, Pearlman and Brannick (2016, p. 123) define action planning as 'agreeing on appropriate measures or indicators of progress and success to reaching coaching goals and developing a plan for achieving those goals'.

c) *Goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee*

Three studies in our review conceptualise the goal-related coach-coachee relationship. For example, Grant (2014) operationalised it as the assessment of goal-focused interactions between coach and coachee from the coachee perspective. De Haan et al. (2016) and Gessnitzer and Kauffeld (2015) focus on the agreement on goals between coach and coachee; either operationalised through a component of the working alliance inventory (WAI; Horvath & Greenberg, 1989) from both coach and coachee perspectives or observational other-ratings utilising a specific coding system.

d) *Other goal activities*

Goal activities that we classified as 'other' were rather general. They were described as 'working towards goals' (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007) or following a goal-focused coaching approach (vs. process-oriented coaching; Williams, 2012; Williams & Lowman, 2018).

Measured Coaching Outcomes

Coaching outcomes can be manifold, and studies vary in their operationalisation of coaching success (e.g. Graßmann et al., 2019). In order to summarise and compare different outcomes in our review, we use the evaluation framework by Kirkpatrick (1967) which consists of four different levels: reaction, learning, behaviour and result. Within the included studies, we identified outcome measures that fit Kirkpatrick's levels of *reaction* (i.e. subjective overall satisfaction with coaching), *learning* (i.e. cognitive and affective learning) and *behaviour* (i.e. changes in competency). Following Kraiger, Ford and Salas (1993), we consider both cognitive and affective learning outcomes. Given that goal attainment can be seen as a key

outcome in coaching (e.g. Graßmann et al., 2019; Spence, 2007) and that goals can be defined at each of the different levels and therefore goal attainment 'cuts across' the levels of the taxonomy, we maintained *goal attainment* as a separate outcome category. We placed outcome measures that included more than one level of Kirkpatrick's taxonomy (e.g. satisfaction *and* competency) into the category of *overarching effectiveness*.

Therefore, we sorted study outcomes into the following categories: (a) Reaction: Subjective satisfaction with the coaching, (b) Learning: Cognitive and affective learning, (c) Behaviour: Changes in competency, (d) Goal attainment, or (e) Overarching effectiveness. Research teams mostly used self-developed measures to assess coaching outcome, only seven out of 15 studies used established scales.

a) Reaction: Subjective satisfaction with coaching success

To measure coaching success, coaches and/or former coachees were asked to indicate their subjective satisfaction with the coaching engagement (e.g. Scoular & Linley, 2006).

b) Learning: Cognitive and affective Learning

In order to identify learning in relation to different cognitive and affective constructs, two research groups applied established rating scales. Rank and Gray (2017) used scales of self-reflection and self-esteem. Grant (2014) utilised a self-insight scale and employed established scales to measure coachees' well-being and depression, anxiety and stress.

c) Behaviour: Changes in competency

In the studies included in our review, coachees assessed their leadership competencies themselves, described specific leadership situations they encountered that were then subjected to expert ratings and/or coachees' supervisors assessed their leadership behaviour.

d) Goal attainment

In order to measure goal attainment, coachees were asked to identify a goal they would like to achieve and rate the degree of goal attainment at the beginning of the coaching engagement

(e.g. in the first coaching session) on a scale from 0% (no attainment) to 100% (complete attainment) and again at the end of the coaching process.

e) Overarching effectiveness

For example, Fenner (2019) merged ratings of an evaluation questionnaire with goal attainment ratings of coachees to create an integrated outcome measure for assessing coaching success.

Findings of Included Studies

Figure 2 summarises our research questions as well as findings on goal activities and their relationship to coaching outcome. We will address each research question in the following.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

RQ 1a: Which goal activities do coaches and coachees engage in?

We identified 11 research articles that address the occurrence and/or perceived importance of goal activities (i.e. goal setting, setting action plans) during workplace coaching engagements, either from the perspective of coaches (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009; David et al., 2014; Kotte, Müller, Diermann, & Möller, 2018; Newsom & Dent, 2011; Vandaveer et al., 2016), coachees (Bechtel, 2018; Jenson, 2016), both coach and coachee (Jansen, Mäthner, & Bachmann, 2004; Wastian & Poetschki, 2016), or observers (Fenner, 2019; Greif, 2015).

Status Quo on Goal Setting. Coaches reported frequently applying goal setting in their coaching practice (Bono et al., 2009; Jansen et al., 2004; Kotte et al., 2018; Newsom & Dent, 2011; Vandaveer al., 2016). In fact, coaches surveyed by Newsom and Dent (2011, $n = 130$) indicated 'frequently' or 'routinely' ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.44$) identifying coaching goals with the client. Psychologist ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.74$) as well as non-psychologist coaches ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.83$) from Bono and colleagues' study (2009, $n = 428$) reported 'often' or 'always' applying goal setting in coaching engagements. In line with these findings, in

Vandaveer and colleagues' mixed methods study (2016) of experienced coaching practitioners, three quarters of the sample ($n = 212$) reported using goal setting in 66% or more of their coaching engagements. Furthermore, the large majority (94%) indicated goal setting as a 'very important' or even 'essential' part of their coaching practice. Findings of Kotte and colleagues' (2018) interview study with 20 experienced workplace coaches indicate that the large majority of coaches ($n = 19$) conduct a goal clarification during the initial exploration in coaching. However, coaches describe it as an open process rather than, for example, applying SMART goal setting.

Regarding the perspective of coachees, findings by Bechtel (2018) point in the same direction. In fact, 98% of coachees (of $n = 171$) indicate retrospectively that their coach worked with them to set at least one coaching goal, thus being the most spread behaviour of described coaching sessions. Other studies suggest that the perspective of coachees differs substantially from that of coaches regarding the frequency of goal activities adopted in coaching. In Jenson's (2016) study, only 47% of 351 questioned former coachees indicated having experienced their coaches practising goal setting behaviour during their coaching engagements (i.e. performance, development, career or transition coaching). However, 80% of respondents reported that they formally negotiated and set goals *prior* to the coaching. Often multiple individuals were involved in this goal setting process (i.e. not only and necessarily coach and coachee but also coachee's supervisor in 46% and coachee's organisation in 27% of coaching engagements).

Jansen and colleagues (2004) conducted a survey with 89 coaches and 74 coachees. Coaches indicate having applied significantly more goal setting than their coachees report having experienced, $t(91.47) = 2.25$, $p < .05$. Wastian and Poetschki (2016) also explored the perspective of both coaches ($n = 42$) and coachees ($n = 16$) on how coaches conduct goal setting. Coaches report engaging in setting specific (90%), realistic (100%) and attractive (65%) goals more frequently than coachees report having experienced these during their

coaching engagements (specific: 30%; realistic: 50%; attractive: 50%). By contrast, the degree to which changes in goals over the course of the coaching engagement were addressed is perceived more similarly between coaches (85%) and coachees (70%). In addition, two distinct patterns of coaches' working with goals were identified. While some coaches identified SMART goal setting as the focus of the coaching at the beginning of the coaching process, other coaches engage in a continuous process of goal clarification and adaptation throughout the whole coaching engagement.

Two observational case studies utilised the rating manual of coach behaviour by Greif et al. (2010) which includes (among eight success factors) the dimension of goal setting. The first observational study was conducted by Greif (2015). The single case that was examined encompassed three online coaching sessions (total of seven hours) of a coachee who was transitioning to a new role with more responsibilities. All success factors were demonstrated by the coach but differed in frequency. The most prominent coaching behaviour was support of the coachee's self-reflection (observed in 41% of sequences of coaching sessions), whereas affect reflection had the lowest ratings (3%). Goal setting was rather prominently demonstrated in 34% of all rated sequences and even more during the first session (50%). Fenner (2019) examined audio material from three complete coaching processes that were conducted by three different coaches with a total of 16 sessions (total of 22 hours). Emotional support was the most frequently shown coaching behaviour (60%), while goal setting was demonstrated least frequently, that is, in 11% of all rated sequences. The findings by Greif (2015) and Fenner (2019) indicate that coaches seem to apply a variety of success factors during coaching sessions but differ in the individual frequency of demonstrating specific factors (e.g. goal setting).

Status Quo on Setting Action Plans. Three studies addressed the occurrence of setting action plans in workplace coaching. In Jenson's study, 43% of surveyed former coachees ($n = 351$) indicated that action plans had been made during their coaching

engagement. Wastian and Poetschki (2016) report differences in perspective between coaches and coachees concerning setting action plans, namely, 60% of coaches ($n = 42$) indicate to have used them while only 30% of coachees ($n = 16$) describe this retrospectively. A similar difference in perspective appears in relation to following up on action plans, that is, monitoring and evaluating goal progress during coaching (coaches: 85%; coachees: 40%). Vandaveer et al. (2016) report that interviewed coaching practitioners ($n = 27$) described action planning (together with goal setting) as a usual step during their typical coaching processes in addition to the steps of needs assessment, contracting, general assessment and data gathering, feedback provision, plan implementation, evaluation of the progress and transitioning to 'post-coaching'.

RQ 1b: Which factors impact upon the occurrence of goal activities?

Given the substantial differences in the reported and observed frequency of goal setting and setting action plans, the question arises which factors impact upon the occurrence of goal activities. Only two studies so far provide initial insights. They focus exclusively on using goal setting as the type of goal activity and on coach characteristics as potential moderating variables. Findings suggest that the degree to which a coach uses goal setting might depend on the coach's educational background and region.

Newsom and Dent's (2011) findings from 130 coaches from different countries showed that coaches with a bachelor's degree reported performing goal setting more frequently than those with doctoral degrees. They further report that more experienced coaches (i.e. with five or more years of coaching experience) applied more goal setting than those with less coaching experience. According to the authors, the reasons for differences between coaches with bachelor versus doctoral degrees might be related to the desire of those with less educational credibility to demonstrate professional credibility by adhering to 'standard coaching practices'. Regarding the influence of the coaches' level of experience, they argue that more

experienced coaches might have a deeper understanding of their coaching practice and therefore take coaching to a more advanced level by applying more goal setting.

David and colleagues (2014) surveyed 194 coaches from the US and Europe. They showed that coaches who had undergone a coach training (lasting longer than 5 weeks) use goals more often in their practice than coaches who learned through experience only. In contrast to Newsom and Dent, David et al. discuss whether more experienced coaches rely more on their accumulated competency and eschew standard models of goal setting (e.g. SMART). Furthermore, they found that coaches from the US reported applying goal setting more frequently than European coaches. They argue that this could be explained by means of the respective cultural traditions from which coaching was developed in the US and Europe.

However, we found no studies that examined contextual factors impacting upon the way in which coach and coachee work with goals.

RQ 2a: Which relationship emerges between goal activities and coaching outcomes?

In the following, findings on the relationship of goal activities on coaching outcomes are reported. Table 2 provides an overview of the measured goal activities and coaching outcomes of the included studies.

[Insert Table 2 here]

The Relationship between Goal Setting and Coaching Outcome. Eight studies assessed the relationship between goal setting and outcomes.

Rank and Gray (2017) examined the association between goal setting and career-related self-reflection of 59 managers who received coaching as they were either unemployed or at the risk of losing their jobs. The coaching was sponsored by a regional economic-development agency. They found that goal setting correlated positively with career-related

self-reflection ($r = .54$) and it emerged as a positive and significant predictor ($\beta = .32$, $p < .05$), whereas it did not predict career-related self-esteem.

Bechtel (2018) surveyed 171 former coachees. Participants reported coaching behaviours of their coach and self-rated goal attainment in retrospect. Results show that goal setting significantly correlated with goal attainment ($r = .41$, $p < .01$). Other measured coaching behaviours also correlated significantly (and even higher) with outcomes, that is, guidance ($r = .53$, $p < .01$), facilitation ($r = .54$, $p < .01$) and inspiration ($r = .45$, $p < .01$).

By contrast, the (quasi-)experimental studies of Scoular and Linley (2006) and Prywes (2012) contradict the previously reported findings. Scoular and Linley (2006) investigated the success of coaching sessions conducted in eight different organisational contexts ranging from large multi-national organisations to small entrepreneurial firms across the southern UK. They did not find a significant difference between participants ($n = 117$) of either goal setting or no goal setting conditions within an experimental between-subjects design on goal attainment or subjective satisfaction with coaching success. Prywes (2012) administered a between-subject design study with 48 postgraduate students and four conditions. Participants either received only a goal attainment scaling interview (GAS), only coaching, both GAS and coaching, or neither. Results show no significant main or interaction effects of coaching or GAS on coachees' goal attainment.

Kappenberg (2008) conducted in-depth interviews with eight seasoned internal executive coaches from one firm on factors that they experience as important for coaching success. Five coaches mentioned goal setting as an important step of successful coaching engagements. It was the second most frequently mentioned coach behaviour ($n = 10$) that coaches referred to both within and across interviewees, while providing candid, honest and constructive feedback ($n = 18$) was the most frequently mentioned.

Terblanche, Albertyn and van Coller-Peter (2017) interviewed 16 experts (i.e. recently promoted senior leaders, coaches, human resource partners and line managers) about their

previous experiences with transition coaching (i.e. coaching during processes of promotion into a senior leadership position). Goal setting emerged as 'standard practice' and an important part of a successful coaching process from coaches' and coachees' perspectives.

In Cowan's interview study (2013), one of the key findings was that the beliefs of external executive coaches ($n = 6$) about the relationship between goal setting and coaching success vary widely. Whereas some coaches describe goal setting as a necessary component of a successful coaching engagement, others assessed goal setting only as a starting point of the coaching that does not predict the coaching outcome.

Only one observational study on the relationship between goal setting and coaching outcome satisfied our inclusion criteria. Fenner (2019) conducted observational ratings of 16 workplace coaching sessions from three coaching dyads using audio material from the sessions. The coachees sought guidance concerning their work-life balance, leadership development and professional transformation. In a descriptive analysis, she found that in successful coaching engagements (i.e. higher goal attainment and satisfaction ratings of the coachee), the coach applied slightly more goal clarification (on average in 11% of all sequences) in comparison to an unsuccessful coaching process (7%).

The Relationship between Setting Action Plans and Coaching Outcome. We identified only one study (Smith & Brummel, 2013) that examined the relationship between creating an action plan during coaching engagements and coaching outcome, namely, competency changes (e.g. on communication or leadership). Smith and Brummel (2013) found that out of 30 executives, those who created a formal action plan (vs. creating an informal action plan or none at all) in the course of their coaching engagement (43%) reported more self-rated competency changes than those who did not, $F(2, 52) = 4.58$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.85$. However, there was no effect with respect to expert-rated, rather than self-rated, behaviour changes.

The Relationship between Goal-Oriented Coach-Coachee Relationship and

Coaching Outcome. Three studies investigated the impact of a goal-focused relationship of coach and coachee on coaching outcome.

Grant (2014) examined the role of a goal-oriented coach-coachee relationship on coachee's goal attainment and coaching effectiveness in 49 coaching engagements from the perspective of coachees (post-graduate coaching students). He found a significant positive correlation between the goal-oriented coach-coachee relationship and goal attainment ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$) but not for changes in measures of self-insight, well-being, anxiety, stress or depression. Nonetheless, results indicated that a goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee was a significantly more powerful predictor of goal attainment than autonomy support or proximity to an 'ideal' relationship.

De Haan et al. (2016) analysed the relationship between coaching effectiveness and mutual agreement on goals between coach and coachee, that is, an adapted version of the goal-related subscale of the Working Alliance Inventory (Horvath & Greenberg, 1989). Findings of their large-scale study of 1895 coaching dyads (from 92 sponsors) suggest a positive correlation between a goal-focused relationship and coaching effectiveness both rated by coaches ($r = .56$, $p < .004$) and by coachees ($r = .56$, $p < .004$). Coach-perceived effectiveness and goal-focused relationship assessed by the coachee correlated significantly to $r = .23$ ($p < .004$), and coachee-perceived effectiveness and goal-focused relationship assessed by the coach showed a correlation of $r = .19$ ($p < .004$). Therefore, when coach and coachee rate both effectiveness and the goal-focused relationship, respectively, the correlation is highest. Given that correlations between the subscale of bond and coaching effectiveness are slightly smaller from coach ($r = .43$) and coachee perspectives ($r = .46$), the authors conclude that while the bond aspect of the relationship is important, coaches need to give particular attention to the coachee's goals during coaching engagements.

In the study by Gessnitzer and Kauffeld (2015), the goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee was rated by means of behavioural data (i.e. sequential analysis of interaction coding data). When the goal behaviour was initiated by the coachee (e.g. the coachee stated a goal and the coach agreed), it was positively related to coaching success ($r = .32$, $p = .039$) whereas it had the opposite effect when it was initiated by the coach ($r = -.39$, $p = .015$).

The Relationship between Other Goal Activities and Coaching Outcome.

Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) conducted interviews with nine former coachees from two large organisations (a UK finance and a Scandinavian telecommunication organisation) in order to identify components that they described as making the coaching engagement a beneficial experience for them. Besides the general coaching relationship, coachees highlighted working towards goals as an important factor of coaching success.

Williams (2012) and Williams and Lowman (2018) conducted a quasi-experimental field study on the effect of coaching on outcomes (i.e. leadership competency and behaviour) with 68 managers who worked for the same profit organisation. The coaching intervention was financed by research funds. Coachees either participated in a goal-focused coaching, a process-orientated coaching, or were in a waiting control group. Williams (2012) describes goal-focused coaching as being content-driven and based on goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990). By comparison, a process-oriented coaching emphasises interpersonal processes (rather than specific content or goals). Whereas coached individuals showed higher self-ratings of leadership competency and behaviour than the control group shortly after the coaching intervention and at the time of the follow-up assessment, there was no significant difference in outcomes between the two coaching groups. Namely, in both groups, regardless of the coaching approach, outcomes increased after receiving coaching. Williams and Lowman (2018) discuss the possibility that coaches might not have adhered to just a goal-focused or process-oriented coaching approach, or that the two approaches might not be

readily separated. They further argue that in coaching, many variables are at play beyond using a particular coaching approach.

RQ 2b: Which factors impact upon the relationship between goal activities and outcomes?

Six of the included studies reported factors that impacted upon the relationship between goal activities and outcomes. Three quantitative studies found significant moderator variables (i.e. input and process factors) while findings of three interview studies suggest that contextual factors might influence the relationship between goal setting and coaching outcome.

Rank and Gray (2017) identified the coachee's self-presentation ability as a moderator variable on the relationship between goal setting and coaching outcome (i.e. self-reflection). More specifically, goal setting related more strongly to self-reflection among coachees high in self-presentation ability. The authors propose that coachees high in self-presentation ability may benefit more strongly from goal setting during coaching as a way of enhancing their introspective capabilities than coachees low in self-presentation 'because low self-presenters are anyway guided by their personal beliefs' (Rank & Gray, 2017, p. 192).

In the study conducted by de Haan et al. (2016), coachee's self-efficacy acted as a moderator variable on the correlation between a coach-coachee goal-focused relationship and coaching effectiveness. Coachees low in self-efficacy benefitted more strongly from a goal-focused relationship. The authors therefore argue that a strong emphasis on goals in coaching might partially compensate for low coachee self-efficacy.

Results of the study by Gessnitzer and Kauffeld (2015) indicate that the effect of a goal-focused relationship on outcomes may depend on who initiates the goal behaviour. Given that the goal-focused relationship only correlated positively with goal attainment when the goal behaviour was coachee-initiated rather than coach-initiated (e.g. the coachee stated a goal and the coach agreed), the authors argue that this effect might be explained by means of the roles

of coach and coachee, respectively, during coaching interactions. When coaches initiate too much goal activity, the coachee might feel as though he or she no longer 'owns' their goal.

In her interview study (*n* = 6), Cowan (2013) addresses the influence of the organisational context on the goal setting during coaching engagements. More specifically, she investigates dynamics and possible challenges when not only the coach and coachee are involved in the coaching engagement and its goal setting, but when there is also 'a third party input' from the coachee's organisation concerning (assigned) coaching goals. She concludes that coaches' fundamental beliefs about goal setting are rather diverse. Some interviewed coaches stated that coaching needs goals in order to being able to evaluate the coaching success for the coachees themselves as well as for the coachee's organisation. In contrast, other coaches emphasised that setting goals at the beginning of the coaching engagement leads to only superficial goals being set and that assigned coaching goals have unhelpful consequences on coaching success for all the parties involved.

In Kappenberg's study, interviewed coaches (*n* = 8) emphasised that goals not only need to be clear and agreed upon by the coach and coachee, but also mentioned the alignment of other stakeholders (e.g. coachee's supervisor) as important to the general success of coaching.

In the study conducted by Terblanche and colleagues (2017), interviewees (*n* = 16) emphasised the relevance of goal alignment for coaching success, that is, goal setting that involves not only the coachee but also the organisation and includes each party's respective needs.

Assessing the Risk of Bias

In the following, possible biases of the included studies are discussed, more specifically concerning measurement and operationalisation of constructs, overall study design, study samples and sample size.

Regarding *measurement and operationalisation*, the majority of included studies reported self-ratings of the experience of goal activities from only one perspective (i.e. coach or coachee). Specifically, (rather) objective other-ratings from expert raters are only seldom investigated. As Gessnitzer and Kauffeld (2015) point out, coaching research trails far behind psychotherapy research in terms of the use of behavioural data. Moreover, research findings indicate discrepancies between the perspectives of coach and coachee concerning the application of goal activities. Therefore, when using data only from one source providing both a predictor and criterion measure (i.e. self-reports of coach or coachee), study findings need to be interpreted with caution. Accordingly, there may be a risk of common method bias (e.g. Podsakoff, McKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) within the data set of included studies that should be acknowledged as it might lead to an overestimation of the relationship between goal activities and coaching effectiveness.

It should also be investigated if the chosen outcome measure (e.g. goal attainment) might be particularly sensitive to the effects of goal-oriented coaching approaches (e.g. following the GROW model) and therefore possibly lead to overestimated associations. Jenson (2016) argues that goal-specific evaluation criteria might produce larger effects than general criteria. Five of 15 studies that included outcome measures assess goal attainment as an outcome. For example, in the study by Grant (2014), goal setting was shown to positively correlate with goal attainment but less closely with less goal-related outcome measures, such as self-insight, well-being, depression, anxiety and stress. Furthermore, the majority of studies used self-developed questionnaires rather than standardised and validated measures. This circumstance makes it more difficult to compare findings across studies.

Regarding the *study design*, studies were mostly cross-sectional and retrospective and not longitudinal, that is, pre-coaching and follow-up assessments are rarely reported. Furthermore, out of the 15 studies assessing the relationship between goal activity and coaching outcome, only four were (quasi-)experimental designs that allow for causal

inferences. It is noteworthy that whereas none of the four (quasi-)experimental studies found a significant relationship between goal activities and outcomes, all correlational studies report at least partly positive associations. As discussed for example by de Haan et al. (2016), a correlation does not imply causality. Especially in regard to the goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee, effects in both directions seem plausible. Namely, a strong (goal-focused) relationship between coach and coachee might predict higher coaching effectiveness ratings, or higher effectiveness might be the reason for strong retrospective assessment of the relationship between coach and coachee.

With regard to *study samples*, in general, when the sample consists of students (i.e. as coach and/or coachee), the question of generalisability of findings arises. This was the case in three of the included studies. In fact, meta-analytic findings indicate higher effect sizes regarding the outcome of coaching students versus professionals (Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015). In other words, coaching behaviour that engenders results for students coached by fellow students may not be the same as what is needed for executives (e.g. Sonesh, Coultas, Marlow et al., 2015). Sonesh, Coultas, Marlow and colleagues (2015) argue that, for example, motivation of coachees might differ from one another in student versus field coachee samples.

Further reconsideration is necessary concerning *sample sizes*. Some of the included studies (both quantitative and qualitative) comprised comparatively small samples. For example, Prywes' (2012) and Williams' (2012) or Williams and Lowman's (2018) lack of findings might also be explained through low statistical power when conducting a between-subject study design with four conditions that involves only 42 or 64 participants, respectively. Although we acknowledge the difficulty of gathering field data, the small sample size and related lack of power limit the interpretability of the (absence of) effects (e.g. Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). Actual relationships between goal activities and

coaching outcome might not have been detected. For qualitative studies, findings of interview studies with small sample sizes (i.e. below 10 interviewees) should not be over-estimated.

Discussion

We conducted a systematic literature review in order to shed light on what we know about the occurrence of different goal activities in workplace coaching and their relationship to coaching outcomes. A total of 24 studies met the eligibility criteria and were synthesised. We summarise our findings on goal activities within a conceptual framework that encompasses coaching outcomes, as well as input, process and contextual factors of coaching (Figure 2).

Summary of Findings

We found that conceptualisations of 'working with goals' in coaching within prior research encompass a wide range of goal activities that could be grouped into four overarching categories, namely, (1) goal setting, (2) setting action/development plans, (3) goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee, and (4) other goal activities. Overall, goal setting is by far the most frequently researched goal activity (total of 17 out of 24 studies). By contrast, studies on supporting goal implementation (e.g. setting and supporting coachee's development plans) or goal adaptation over the course of the coaching process are far less frequent and thus little is currently known about them empirically.

Concerning the status quo of goal activities, we found that coaches frequently indicate the application of goal setting in their coaching practice. Studies with coachee samples, however, show in part differentiating findings: Mostly, they indicate that coachees perceive goal setting (and other goal activities such as goal implementation support) as occurring less often than coaches describe.

While goal setting is assessed as prominent coaching behaviour, it emerges as only one of many components of coaching practice together with other, generally more prominent coach behaviours (e.g. providing emotional support or feedback).

Initial findings indicate that coaches' use of goal setting might depend on their regional and educational background. Research on factors impacting upon the occurrence of goal activities so far has, however, neglected to examine the potential influence of contextual factors of the coaching engagement.

Regarding the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome, most frequently measured and reported are outcomes on the level of reaction and goal attainment (five out of 15 studies, respectively). Six out of 15 studies indicate that goal activities relate to positive coaching outcomes, while five studies found empirical support for only partly positive associations (i.e. depending on the perspective or assessed outcome measure). Four studies found no significant link between goal activities and coaching success. Within the quantitative studies, reported effect sizes range from $r = .32$ to $.56$ or $d = .85$, that is, they can be interpreted as medium to large effects (Cohen, 1988).

All in all, studies only rarely reported variables that might have impacted upon the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcomes. Hence, empirical evidence on possible moderators is rather scarce so far. Initial findings from quantitative studies suggest that whether the goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee impacts positively or negatively upon goal attainment might depend on process factors, namely, on who (i.e. coach or coachee) initiates the goal behaviour. Coachee characteristics (i.e. input factors) were also identified as moderator variables on coaching effectiveness, namely, coachee self-efficacy and coachee self-presentation ability. What is mostly absent from previous research are moderators that relate to the content of the coaching (and coaching goals) and the context of the coaching engagement (i.e. beyond the general conclusion that goal alignment is relevant for coaching success).

Relative Scarcity of Empirical Research on Working with Goals in Coaching

One of the main findings of our review is the rather low number of studies that could be included, in spite of the extensive literature search. We can thereby confirm a – somewhat surprising – lack of empirical research on goal activities in coaching so far (Bozer & Jones, 2018), notwithstanding the prevalence and popularity of goals amongst practitioners and their uncontested place in most coaching definitions (e.g. David et al., 2014; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza et al., 2015). Many articles that we found during our literature search had to be excluded as they were purely conceptual, descriptive or prescriptive, and did not include any empirical data. Others were not included because they simply claimed a positive effect of goals on the grounds of high goal attainment after coaching without assessing goal activities.

Manifold Nature of Working with Goals in Coaching Research and Practice

Another key finding of our study is the diverse array of goal activities besides (SMART) goal setting that has been examined in research so far. We advance the rather disjointed literature on goals in coaching by proposing a categorisation of goal activities and thereby providing an overview of different conceptualisations of working with goals in extant coaching research.

Concerning coaching practice, it has been criticised that many coaches tend to equate goal setting with SMART goals rather than considering different types of goals at different levels of abstraction (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). Here, our synthesis of empirical data provides support for a slightly different picture, indicating that coaches pursue various approaches of working with goals in coaching practice and conduct goal setting not necessarily (only) at the beginning of a coaching engagement. For example, Wastian and Poetschki (2016) identified two distinct patterns how coaches report to work with goals in coaching that are in line with Clutterbuck and Spence's (2017) differentiation between a linear and a more systemic view on goals. While the linear (i.e. SMART-oriented) view assumes that coaching is a sequential process of relatively discrete events, namely, goal

setting, action planning and goal-oriented action implementation, a systemic view considers goals to be rather unstable and contingent upon contextual influences, thereby requiring ongoing flexibility in discovering, formulating and adapting goals over the course of the entire coaching engagement.

Inconclusive Research on the Relationship between Goal Activities and Coaching Outcome

We found that the few extant findings on the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcomes are not as clear or unanimous as one might expect considering the central role that goals are assumed to play in coaching within the conceptual and practitioner literature (e.g. Clutterbuck & David, 2016).

Interestingly, a lack of (or limited) association was found in studies that implemented 'stricter' study designs, that is, a (quasi-)experimental study design, explored learning rather than reaction outcomes, or operationalised goal activities or outcome measures through other-ratings. Put differently, reaction and goal attainment seem to be related more closely to goal activities than other outcome measures (i.e. learning, behaviour), and effects appear more strongly when both goal activity and outcome were assessed by the same source (e.g. coachees) and in retrospective.

The empirical evidence to date therefore seems to resonate with rather critical voices that question the frequent advocating of goal setting as an imperative of successful coaching (e.g. Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017; Grant, 2012).

Neglected Role of the (Organisational) Context

Few studies addressed potential moderating variables on the occurrence of goal activities or the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome. These were coach or coachee characteristics, or whether the coach or coachee initiated the goal behaviour, that is, input and

coaching process factors (see Figure 2). However, moderators that concern the content of the coaching (e.g. operational vs. more holistic issues) or the organisational context (e.g. involvement of the coachee's organisation) are mostly absent from the current research.

More specifically, included studies rarely provided sufficient information about the content of the coaching engagements or their organisational embeddedness (e.g. who initiated or paid for the coaching, i.e. the coachee, the coachee's organisation or a third party). It was therefore not possible in our review to draw any conclusions regarding the impact of coaching content on goal activities.

Furthermore, we identified only three (qualitative) studies that addressed goal setting processes that include a 'third party input' (Cowan, 2013) or that touched upon the organisational context of the coachee, namely, the alignment of goals between coachees and their organisation (Kappenberg, 2008; Terblanche et al., 2017). However, coaching is increasingly discussed as a contextualised, triangular intervention, shaped by the organisational context it is embedded in (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2014). Against this background, the involvement of third parties and the organisational context might affect the goal selection process and goal attainment (e.g. Grant, 2006, 2012). Moreover, as Clutterbuck and Spence (2017) point out, the adequacy of different types of goals might depend on the degree of complexity and speed of change of the environment. They argue that while SMART performance goals might be adequate for simple problems in slowly changing environments, highly complex and/or fast-changing environments require flexible performance goals, learning goals and/or 'fuzzy' goals. Given that today's business world is commonly described as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA; e.g. Wilson & Lawton-Smith, 2016), it requires concepts of 'new work' (e.g. Schermuly, 2019) and in turn a context-sensitive approach to working with goals in coaching.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

The current body of research suggests that coaching practitioners use a broad range of goal activities in coaching. However, the majority of included studies only addressed one specific goal activity in isolation. Hence, fertile areas for future research could be to investigate the (simultaneous) occurrence of different approaches of working with goals in coaching and their distinct relationship to coaching outcome. Ideally, this would be investigated both in large-scale survey designs (considering a range of goal activities as predictors of coaching outcome) as well as in (quasi-)experimental study designs (i.e. manipulating types or range of goal activities).

In light of the tentative findings that goal activities appear neither consistently beneficial nor uniformly harmful in relation to coaching outcome, more research is needed to better understand factors that impact upon the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcomes. Most of the reported studies rarely provided (sufficient) information on the organisational embeddedness of the coaching (or lacked an organisational context altogether by relying on student samples), let alone considered the potential impact of the organisational context or content of the coaching goal on goal activities and coaching outcome. Therefore, future studies should examine the influence of goal characteristics (e.g. specificity/level of abstraction, goal content) and contextual factors (e.g. third party involvement concerning goals, complexity and volatility of the organisational context, organisational and societal culture) on goal activities and coaching outcome. This appears necessary in order to do justice to the allegedly rather complex relationship between goal activities and coaching outcome, and the likely impact of additional influencing factors. For example, the impact of goal alignment (and potential goal conflicts) among different coaching stakeholders (e.g. the individual coachee, organisational sponsors) on the goal setting process and coaching outcome could be investigated in additional studies.

Even though we strongly suggest that additional research is needed in order to gain a more differentiated understanding of goals in coaching and provide evidence-based guidelines for practitioners, first practical implications can be deduced. We reason that rather than arguing for or against (a certain way of) setting goals in coaching, coaches should adopt more nuanced perspectives that seek to determine how to work with goals in different ways and contexts, taking into account both the personal characteristics of their coachees as well as contextual factors (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2017). Furthermore, seeing that coach-initiated goal behaviour can also be negatively related to coaching outcome (Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015), we agree with David and colleagues (2016) that coaching practitioners should keep potential pitfalls of (simplistic) goal approaches in mind, for example, focusing too fast on a 'wrong' objective or superficial goal, and hence neglecting the exploration of potentially 'hidden' issues.

Limitations

We discussed limitations that arise from included studies above, in particular the possible biases that result from operationalisation, design and samples. The main constraint of our review itself is the limited number of studies that could be included although we allowed for a broad scope of quantitative, qualitative and observational studies. Therefore, our findings are only tentative, given that they could not be grounded on an extensive empirical data base. We acknowledge that our strict inclusion criteria may be a double-edged sword (e.g. Bozer & Jones, 2018), as there may have been studies that were excluded from our review due to our rather narrow focus. Namely, we chose to focus on goal activity, in other words, coaching session moderators (Grant, 2012). Consequently, studies that examined only goal-related coachee characteristics (e.g. motivation or goal-orientation) or coach characteristics (e.g. coach's authentic leadership style) without also examining goal activity were not included. Furthermore, we focused on workplace coaching as life coaching usually deals with more holistic issues while the work-related focus that is at the core of our review constitutes only

one of many possible coaching topics and of varying relevance (Grant, 2005). Finally, we only included studies in English and German. Therefore, findings concerning a broader spectrum of coaching topics or published in other languages are not contained in our review. Although the nationality of study participants was diverse, we cannot rule out potential biases of culture on the findings of the included studies. Put differently, the direction or existence of findings on the relationship between goal activities and coaching outcomes might (also) depend on the coach's and/or coachee's national and cultural background.

Conclusion

'Working with goals' in coaching is conceptualised in various forms in the extant research. Nonetheless, empirical findings on goal activities, especially goal activities other than goal setting, are rather scarce. A number of studies indicate that goal setting is reported as being applied frequently, but that perspectives of coaches and coachees might diverge. Findings suggest that goals may indeed play an important role in improving coaching outcomes. However, findings are not unanimous, and the scarce empirical basis to date stands in stark contrast to the strong claims made about the central role of goals in coaching (e.g. Grant, 2012). Does our review challenge the 'sacred cow' (Scoular & Linley, 2006, p. 9) of goals in coaching research and practice? Partly, yes. More research is thus warranted in order to further investigate the relevance of goal activities in workplace coaching. We take this as an opportunity to call for future research on moderating factors (i.e. input, process and contextual factors) that might affect the relationship between (a broader range of) goal activities and coaching outcomes.

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Table 1

Characteristics of studies included in the systematic literature review

Author(s)	Year	Method	Measured Goal activity	Data source: Goal activity	Measured Outcome	Data source: Outcome	Time of measurement	Sample size	Content of coaching	Coach characteristic: Experience/ internal vs. external	Coachee characteristic	Coaching duration	Language/ Nationality of sample
Bechtel	2018	Quantitative	Goal setting	Coachee	Goal attainment	Coachee	1, Retrospective	171	NA	NA/ external or internal	Executives, managers, supervisors or individual contributors	3-7 sessions or more	English/ USA
Bono et al.	2009	Quantitative	Goal setting	Coach	No outcome	NA	1, Frequency in regular coaching practice	428	NA	M = 7.5-11.6 years/ NA	Level of vice president, director and middle managers	NA	English/ USA
Cowan	2013	Interview study	Goal setting	Coach	Reaction	Coach	1, Retrospective	6	NA (assigned goals)	5-20 years/ external	Corporate clients	NA	English/ NA
David et al.	2014	Quantitative	Goal setting	Coach	No outcome	NA	1, Frequency in regular coaching practice	194	NA	NA	NA	NA	English/ International sample (USA & Europe)
de Haan et al.	2016	Quantitative	Goal-focused relationship (coach-coachee)	Coach + Coachee	Over-arching effective-ness	Coach + Coachee	1, Retrospective	1895 coach-coachee dyads	Varied (e.g. management skills, personal development, leadership development)	M = 13.3 years/ external or internal	NA	Modal duration: 4-6 months	English/ International sample (NA)

Author(s)	Year	Method	Measured Goal activity	Data source: Goal activity	Measured Outcome	Data source: Outcome	Time of measurement	Sample size	Content of coaching	Coach characteristic: Experience/ internal vs. external	Coachee characteristic	Coaching duration	Language/ Nationality of sample
Fenner	2019	Observational study	Goal setting	External rater	Over-arching effective-ness	Coachee	*Ratings:* over entire coaching process (all sessions); *Effectiveness:* 1, post-coaching assessment	3	Varied (e.g. leadership development, career coaching)	*M* = 12 years/ external	NA	2-8 sessions	German/ Germany
Gessnitzer & Kauffeld	2015	Observational study	Goal-focused relationship (coach-coachee)	External rater	Goal attainment	Coachee	*Ratings:* over entire coaching process (all sessions); *Goal attainment:* 2, pre-coaching + post-coaching assessment	31 coach-coachee dyads	Career coaching	Novice (student)/ NA	Collegiate clients (students)	5 sessions, 3 months	English/ Germany
Grant	2014	Quantitative	Goal-focused coaching relationship	Coachee	Learning + Goal attainment	Coachee	2, pre-coaching + post-coaching assessment	49	NA	Novice (post-graduate students)/ NA	Collegiate clients (post-graduate students)	4 sessions, 10-12 weeks	English/ Australia
Greif	2015	Observational study	Goal setting	External rater	No outcome	NA	Ratings over entire coaching process (all sessions)	1	Transition coaching	NA	NA	3 sessions (7 hours)	German/ Germany
Gyllensten & Palmer	2007	Interview study	Other (i.e. Working towards goals)	Coachee	Reaction	Coachee	1, Retrospective	9	Varied (e.g. self-confidence, promotion)	NA/ internal	NA	NA	English/ International sample (UK & Scandinavia)

Author(s)	Year	Method	Measured Goal activity	Data source: Goal activity	Measured Outcome	Data source: Outcome	Time of measurement	Sample size	Content of coaching	Coach character-istic: Experience/ internal vs. external	Coachee character-istic	Coaching duration	Language/ Nationality of sample
Jansen et al.	2004	Quantitative	Goal setting	Coach + Coachee	No outcome	NA	1, Retrospective	89 coaches; 74 coachees	NA	$M = 8.60$ years/ external	NA	NA	German/ Germany
Jenson	2016	Quantitative	Goal setting, setting development plans	Coachee	No outcome	NA	1, Retrospective	351	Varied (e.g. performance, development, career coaching)	NA/ external or internal	Managerial or team lead level	6 months - 1 year	English/ USA
Kappenberg	2008	Mixed methods (we included only qualitative findings)	Goal setting	Coach	Reaction	Coach	1, General attitude/overall experience	8 (interview) (36, survey)	NA	$M = 11.5$ years/ internal	NA	6-12 months	English/ USA
Kotte et al.	2018	Interview study	Goal setting	Coach	No outcome	NA	1, Frequency in regular coaching practice	20	NA	$M = 12.1$ years/ external or internal	NA	NA	English/ Germany
Newsom & Dent	2011	Quantitative	Goal setting	Coach	No outcome	NA	1, Frequency in regular coaching practice	130	NA	6-10 years/ external	NA	NA	English/ International sample (NA)
Prywes	2012	Quantitative	Goal setting	Experimental condition (randomised controlled between-subject design)	Goal attainment	Coachee	2, pre-coaching + post-coaching assessment	48	Varied	Novice/ collegiate clients (post-graduate students)	10-15 years of professional management experience	15 hours, 4 weeks	English/ USA

Author(s)	Year	Method	Measured Goal activity	Data source: Goal activity	Measured Outcome	Data source: Outcome	Time of measurement	Sample size	Content of coaching	Coach characteristic: Experience/ internal vs. external	Coachee characteristic	Coaching duration	Language/ Nationality of sample
Rank & Gray	2017	Quantitative	Goal setting	Coachee	Learning	Coachee	1, Retrospective	59	NA	Min. 10 years/ external	Managers (varied levels of seniority); either unemployed or at risk of losing their jobs	10 hours, 3 months	English/ UK
Scoular & Linley	2006	Mixed methods (we included only quantitative findings)	Goal setting	Experimental condition (randomised controlled between-subject design)	Reaction + Goal attainment	Coach + Coachee	1, Retrospective	117	Varied (e.g. work-life balance, career coaching)	NA/ external	NA	1 session, 30 minutes	English/ UK
Smith & Brummel	2013	Interview study	Setting development plan	Coachee	Behaviour	Coachee + Expert rating	1, Retrospective	30	Varied	NA/ external	Level of upper management	NA	English/ NA
Terblanche et al.	2017	Interview study	Goal setting	Coach, Coachee, HR	Reaction	Coach, Coachee, HR	1, Retrospective	16	Transition coaching	NA	Senior leaders	NA	English/ South Africa
Vandaveer et al.	2016	Mixed methods	Goal setting	Coach	No outcome	NA	Typical coaching practice	27 (inter-view) 282 (survey)	Varied (e.g. performance, development, transition coaching)	$M = 24.3$ years/ external or internal	Senior executives, high potentials	NA	English/ USA

Author(s)	Year	Method	Measured Goal activity	Data source: Goal activity	Measured Outcome	Data source: Outcome	Time of measurement	Sample size	Content of coaching	Coach characteristic: Experience/ internal vs. external	Coachee characteristic	Coaching duration	Language/ Nationality of sample
Wastian & Poetschki	2016	Interview study	Goal setting, setting action plans	Coach + Coachee	No outcome	NA	Retrospective after coaching engagement	42 coaches, 16 coachees	Varied (e.g. performance, development, career coaching)	3-31 years/ NA	Executives, professionals	2-11 sessions	German/ Germany
Williams	2012	Quantitative	Other (Goal-focused coaching)	Experimental condition (random assignment/ switching-replication design)	Behaviour	Coachee	3, pre-coaching, post-coaching + follow-up assessment	64	Leadership development	Min. 2 years/ external	Senior executives (at least level of middle management)	4 sessions, 4-6 weeks	English/ USA
Williams & Lowman	2018	Quantitative	Other (Goal-focused coaching)	Experimental condition (random assignment/ switching-replications design)	Behaviour	Coachee	3, pre-coaching, post-coaching + follow-up assessment	64	Leadership development	Min. 2 years/ external	Senior executives (at least level of middle management)	4 sessions, 4-6 weeks	English/ USA

Table 2

Summary of measured goal activities split by measured coaching outcomes

Goal Activity	Outcome				
	Reaction: Subjective satisfaction	Learning: Cognitive and affective learning	Behaviour: Changes in competency	Goal attainment	Overarching effectiveness
Goal setting	4	1		3	1
	Cowan (2013); Kappenberg (2008); Scoular & Linley (2006)*; Terblanche et al. (2017)	Rank & Gray (2017)		Bechtel (2018); Prywes (2012); Scoular & Linley (2006)*	Fenner (2019)
Setting action/ development plan			1		
			Smith & Brummel (2013)		
Goal-focused relationship		1		2	1
		Grant (2014)*		Gessnitzer & Kauffeld (2015); Grant (2014)*	de Haan et al. (2016)
Other goal activity	1		2		
	Gyllensten & Palmer (2007)		Williams (2012); Williams & Lowman (2018)		

Figure 1

PRISMA diagram of systematic literature review process (adapted from Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009)
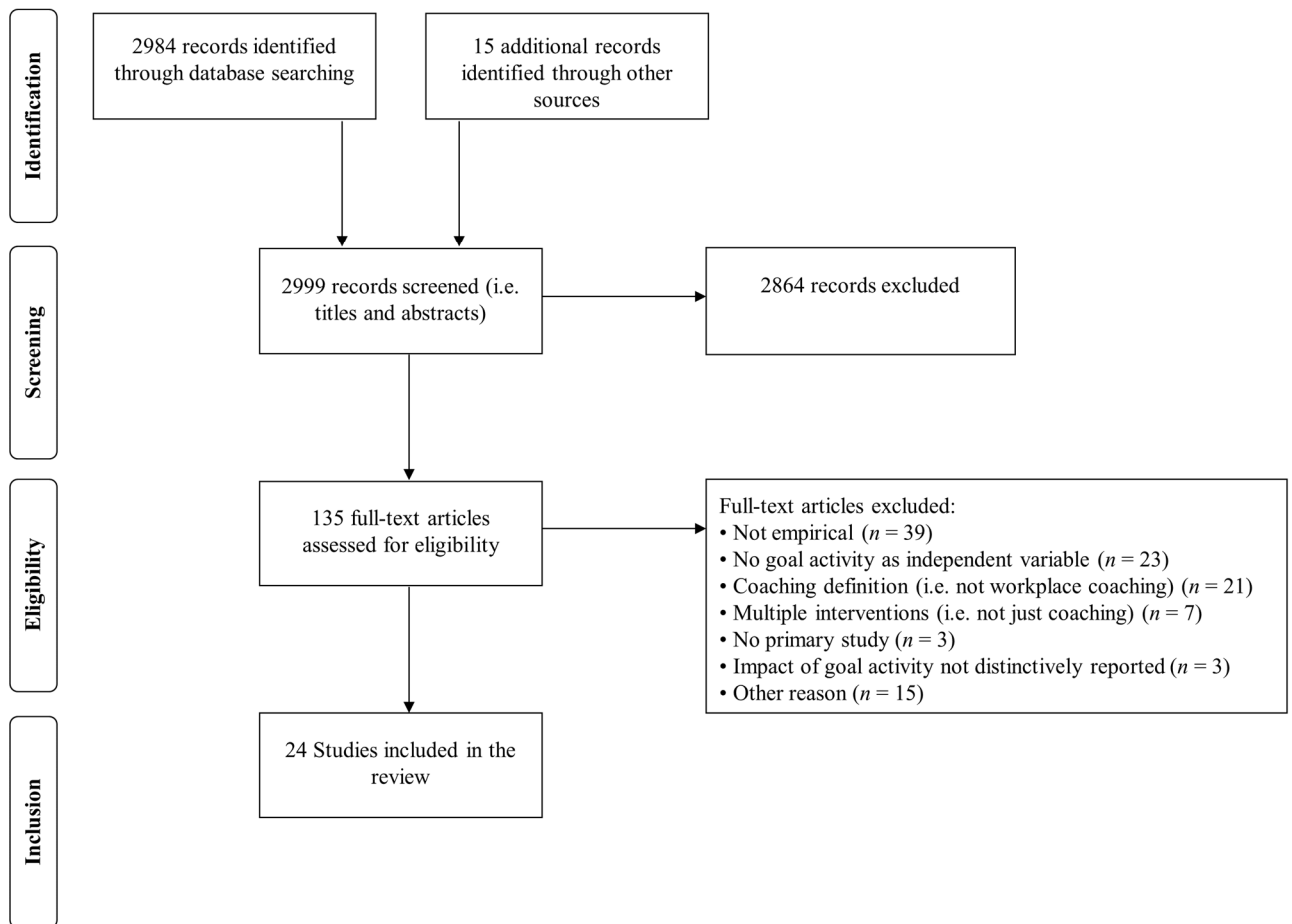
Figure 2

Research questions 1 and 2 and respective findings within an overarching coaching framework

Input Factors

Coachee characteristics
- *Self-presentation ability*
- *Self-efficacy*

Process Factors

Goal Activities
- Goal setting
- Setting action/development plans
- Goal-focused relationship between coach and coachee
- Other goal activity

Initiator of goal activitiy (coach vs. coachee)

RQ 2a
Which relationship emerges between goal activities and coaching outcome?

Outcome

Coaching Outcome
- Reaction: Subjective satisfaction with coaching
- Learning: Cognitive and affective learning
- Behaviour: Changes in competency
- Goal attainment
- Overarching effectiveness

RQ 2b
Which factors impact upon the relationship between goal activities and outcome?

Contextual Factors
- *Multi-stakeholder contracting*

7.2 Study 2: "Constructing a full picture of the coaching client: Coaching practices during the initial exploration in workplace coaching and how they relate to coach characteristics"

Abstract

Even though an increasing number of professionals with various backgrounds are entering the coaching market, professionally agreed-upon standards for coaching practice are largely lacking. There is also a dearth of knowledge of how coaches actually proceed during coaching engagements. Previous research emphasizes the relevance of coach behavior especially during the beginning stages of coaching. We therefore conducted an online survey with coaching practitioners ($N = 218$) on their coaching practices during the initial exploration of workplace coaching, investigating both the content they explore and the methods they use. Performing a principal component analysis on a set of 60 items, five components of initial exploration practices emerged: Exploration of the coachee's (1) professional (2) and personal context, using (3) standardized methods and (4) active and creative methods, and (5) clarification of coaching issues and goals. The results of multiple regression analyses revealed certain coach characteristics as significant predictors of reported exploration practices, namely, coaching experience, holding an academic degree in social studies/education, and coaching approach (i.e., psychoanalytic/psychodynamic, transactional analysis, cognitive-behavioral, NLP). We outline perspectives for future research and indicate how our findings can serve coaching practitioners, coachees, HR professionals, and providers of coaching training programs.

Introduction

The use of workplace coaching as a development tool has exploded in popularity over the past few decades, as demonstrated by an increasing demand for coaching and a continuously growing number of coaches worldwide (International Coach Federation, 2016). In line with

the current coaching literature, we understand *workplace coaching* as a relationship-based, reflection- and goal-oriented learning and development intervention that is provided by a professional coach to a client (coachee) in a one-on-one setting with the aim of achieving professional goals for the client's and the organization's benefit (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Jones et al., 2016). One might think that the maturing and expanding coaching market encompasses qualification standards for coaches. However, there exist few barriers to entering the coaching field and no professionally agreed-upon standards or established norms for coaching practice (e.g., Vandaveer et al., 2016). Moreover, little is known about how coaches proceed during their usual coaching practice (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Gettman et al., 2019; Newsom & Dent, 2011). Stober (2006, p. 33) argues that 'in order to coach at more than [a] rudimentary, surface level, the coach must take the time to construct a full picture of the client.' Accordingly, empirical findings suggest that a precise exploration and a clear focus at the beginning of a coaching engagement might enhance coaching effectiveness and mitigate not only the risk of client dropout from coaching but also the negative effects of coaching for the coachee (De Haan et al., 2019; Schermuly, 2018; Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). The findings of empirical studies indicate that an intervention focus positively affects coaching outcomes (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). It is nonetheless still unclear how coaches ascertain this focus or, put differently, how they 'get to the nub of the issue' (Dagley, 2009, p. 68). Furthermore, seeing that multiple stakeholders are often involved in a coaching engagement (i.e., coach, coachee, stakeholders from the coachee's organization), there might be various and possibly diverging interests and expectations regarding the coaching intervention (Burger & Van Coller-Peter, 2019). As unfulfilled expectations are described as a prominent cause for client dropout from coaching, coaches are supposed to explore and align the potentially opposing expectations of stakeholders at the beginning of new coaching engagements (Schermuly, 2018). It therefore seems especially worthwhile to gain insights into how coaches approach their coachees at the beginning of a new coaching engagement

and, more specifically, their coaching practices during the *initial exploration* of workplace coaching. We define initial exploration as all activities that coaches engage in to systematically gather and process relevant information about their coachees, their situation, and the organizational context, with the purpose of generating a preliminary 'diagnosis' and deducing appropriate interventions (Kotte et al., 2018).

Given the scarcity of research on coaching practices to date, especially with respect to what coaches do during the beginning stages of coaching and despite its importance to the whole coaching process (e.g., Barner, 2006; Gettman et al., 2019), the purpose of our study is to provide an overview of reported practices of workplace coaches during the initial exploration. For that reason, we set out to examine which methods coaches report using (i.e., *how* they approach their coachees) and which topics and issues they indicate that they address (i.e., *what* they explore content-wise) during the initial exploration of workplace coaching engagements. Considering that there is an ongoing debate about how the approaches taken by coaches might differ from each other and the impact of the coaches' background upon their coaching practice as well as the fact that there is only limited research on this matter (e.g., Bastian, 2015), we investigate which coach characteristics (e.g., demographics, educational background) impact upon their practices during the initial exploration.

State of the literature

Importance of initial exploration in coaching

What happens between coaches and coachees at the beginning of coaching engagements appears to be particularly important for several reasons. Empirical evidence suggests a relationship between the experienced quality of the coach-coachee working alliance during the first coaching session and the coachee's goal attainment at the end of the coaching engagement (Ianiro et al., 2013). In addition, coaches indicate that, besides the quality of the coach-coachee relationship, the clarity of the coaching objective, goal setting, and visioning

are important factors that ensure coaching success (Vandaveer et al., 2016). Findings of a randomized controlled trial by De Haan et al. (2019) indicate the relevance of exploring the coachees' preparedness for coaching at the start of each coaching engagement, given that coachees with higher preparedness for coaching were more likely to report higher coaching effectiveness scores at the end of the coaching engagement. In a similar vein, Stober (2006) argues that in order to coach well, the coach must take the time to understand who the coachee is as a whole and therefore go further than merely exploring the coachee's professional background and job-related experiences. Furthermore, differentiating whether topics are possibly more appropriate for psychotherapy than coaching before pursuing the coaching engagement is seen as a central responsibility of coaches in order to prevent detrimental effects on their potential coachees (Grant & Green, 2018). In fact, it has been argued that coaches who cannot detect deep-rooted psychological problems might do more harm than good (e.g., Bastian, 2015). Schermuly and Graßmann (2019) found a relationship between negative effects of coaching for the coachee and an imprecisely conducted diagnostic, a lack of awareness of the coachee's problems, and the number of issues addressed during the coaching. Put differently, a proper exploration and a focus on a small number of issues might mitigate any negative effects of coaching. Furthermore, previous research indicates that the exploration and alignment of expectations regarding the coaching (e.g., from different involved stakeholders) not only affects potential client dropout from coaching but also coaching outcomes (Burger & Van Coller-Peter, 2019; Schermuly, 2018).

Taken together, previous research suggests the importance of an elaborate initial exploration and the development of an understanding of the coachee and their issues. This is to ensure that (a) a successful working relationship between coach and coachee can be established, (b) coaching is the appropriate intervention, and (c) the coachee is able to benefit from coaching. It therefore appears particularly relevant to examine coaching practices at the beginning of the coaching engagement. In line with Kotte et al. (2018), we thus focus on

coach activities during the initial exploration, that is, activities that have primarily a diagnostic purpose and form the basis for later intervention practices (i.e., aiming at behavior change). We put an emphasis on the initial exploration in contrast to ongoing or process exploration practices that might occur over the course of the entire coaching engagement (i.e., in alternation with coaching interventions).

Exploration and assessment practices in coaching

Given that the initial exploration might encompass practices of contracting, assessment, exploration of the coaching topic, and goal setting, we reviewed previous studies that examined these coaching practices. Reviewing the extant coaching literature, few studies so far have concentrated on what the coach actually *does* (i.e., their techniques, coaching behavior; Gettman et al., 2019). When the use of coaching practices is examined, almost all previous studies consider the application of coaching practices in general, that is, practices that are (potentially) used over the course of the whole coaching process.

Regarding coaches' methodological practices, the extant surveys explored how frequently coaches apply specific methods (e.g., goal setting), use different assessment tools (e.g., multisource ratings), or utilize psychometric tests throughout the entire coaching engagement (Bono et al., 2009; David et al., 2014; Del Giudice et al., 2014; Jenson, 2016; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008; Marshall, 2006; McDowall & Smewing, 2009; Newsom & Dent, 2011; Vandaveer et al., 2016). Findings indicate that coaches report that they apply various (assessment) methods such as conducting interviews (with their coachee and/or others), goal setting, using psychometric tests (e.g., personality or cognitive tests), multisource ratings (e.g., 360-degree-feedback), requesting performance data/appraisal, or role-playing.

Concerning the exploration of content, De Haan et al. (2009) argue that 'coaching issues' are difficult to define but can be understood as the topics, questions, problems, experiences, and hopes that the coachee shares with the coach. Bastian (2015) acknowledges that coaches

aim to understand their coachee's strengths, areas of development, and work history in order to ensure they can make informed suggestions on the appropriate needs for development. Marshall (2006) elaborates that topics of assessment in coaching are the coachee's personality, leadership style, interpersonal communication style, strengths, and current stage of development. This is similar to Barner (2006) who names the coachee's goals, leadership style, work history, professional and private context, and organizational culture among relevant content to be explored during the assessment of the coachee.

To our knowledge, Kotte et al. (2018) conducted the first and only empirical study to date specifically on coaches' initial exploration practice in workplace coaching. Based on 20 interviews with experienced workplace coaches, their findings indicate that coaches report that they apply a variety of methods and address a diversity of topics during the initial exploration. Whereas there was high agreement on some methods and topics across the majority of interviewed coaches (e.g., using interview techniques, goal setting, and exploring the current professional situation), differences emerged, for example, concerning the use of standardized guidelines or focusing on solutions versus problems. Most coaches reported that they assess whether coaching is the right intervention at the beginning of the coaching engagement (or if, for example, the coachee would benefit more from psychotherapy), while they indicated only seldom using psychometric assessment and organizational data (e.g., 360-degree-feedback).

Considering that only one (qualitative) study explicitly focusing on coaching practices during the initial exploration of coaching has been conducted to date, we identified a dearth of quantitative investigation into this matter. We aim to close this gap by providing an overview of the practices that a substantially large sample of coaches report engaging in during the initial exploration of workplace coaching. Due to the lack of previous research, we seek to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. Which overarching dimensions of initial exploration practices (i.e., methods applied and topics addressed) emerge in workplace coaching?

RQ2. Which initial exploration practices are reported as being frequently versus rarely applied by workplace coaches?

Factors impacting upon coaches' exploration and assessment practices

Given the lack of regulation in the coaching market and the wide variety of backgrounds for coaches entering the coaching field, it is likely that there is divergence in the methods they use and topics they address during their coaching practice (e.g., Bono et al., 2009; Marsden et al., 2010). Previous findings hint at possible influencing factors on coaches' practices. In order to analyze which factors potentially impact upon coaches' initial exploration practices, we now summarize the extant research on such factors upon coaches' exploration and assessment practices.

Coaches are professionals with diverse educational backgrounds and they are exposed to different tools and resources during their specific academic and professional training (Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008). It is therefore reasonable to assume that the academic degrees that coaches hold influence their practices (Bastian, 2015). One aspect regarding the coaches' academic background that has received particular attention in research so far is whether coaches have a psychology or business degree. It has been argued that only coaches with psychological training are qualified to administer and interpret psychological assessment (e.g., Bono et al., 2009; Del Giudice et al., 2014). Others have proposed that coaches need business knowledge and an understanding of organizations in order to fully understand their coachees' coaching issue (e.g., Foxhall, 2002). For instance, Marsden et al. (2010) postulate that psychologist coaches show a tendency to focus on the individual and interpersonal relationship issues of the coachee rather than strategic or business issues during the coaching assessment, whereas it is the other way around for coaches with a business or consulting

background. Newsom and Dent (2011) found that coaches with a business education reported that they perform more 'professional coach activities' (e.g., applying knowledge of organizational development theories) than coaches who lack business knowledge. Three previously conducted survey studies compared the coaching assessment practices of psychologists versus non-psychologists. On the one hand, Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008) and Bono et al. (2009) report that psychologist coaches indicated using specific methods (e.g., personality tests, 360-degree-feedback) and including information from multiple sources (e.g., coachee's supervisors) significantly more often than coaches with a business or education background. On the other hand, overall differences were minor (Bono et al., 2009). Furthermore, in Bastian's (2015) revised version of the survey by Bono and colleagues, no significant differences were found among coaches with a psychology versus business degree. Beyond the comparison of coaches with a psychology versus business background, it was further discussed that coaches who have a degree in social studies and who worked in helping professions (e.g., counsellors, social workers) before becoming a coach might tend to be more focused on the personal aspect of the coachee and less concerned about 'the business side of things' (Bono et al., 2009, p. 388).

Besides their academic background, scholars have discussed the possible influence of coaches' gender, their coaching experience, and whether or not they have completed coach training on their coaching practice (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015; Baker, 2014; David et al., 2014; Newsom & Dent, 2011). Regarding the coach's gender, female coaches reported applying goal setting more frequently than male coaches (Newsom & Dent, 2011). Experience in coaching might enable coaches to create their own style of practice (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015), while, in lieu of a lack of experience, a novice coach might rely more on structured knowledge (e.g., following popular standard models in coaching such as SMART goal setting, e.g., David et al., 2014) than an experienced coach (Baker, 2014). Whereas David et al. (2014) found a negative correlation between coaching experience and

use of goal setting (for European coaches), Newsom and Dent (2011) report that more experienced coaches (from the US) applied *more* goal setting than those with less coaching experience. Furthermore, David et al. (2014) found that coaches who had undergone a coach training used more goal setting in their coaching practice.

In addition to this, the methods a coach utilizes during the initial exploration might depend on the coaching approach, style, or model that the coach uses in their practice. Various handbooks present the variety of applied approaches in coaching in general (e.g., Stober & Grant, 2006) or, for instance, in exploration practices in particular (Möller & Kotte, 2013). Grant and Gerrard (2020) discuss that, depending on their preferred coaching approach, some coaches emphasize problem analyses whereas other coaches focus on goals and solutions in their coaching practice. One could therefore assume that the coaching model that provides the coach with an underpinning to their practice might impact the topics addressed and methods that are applied during the initial exploration.

Given that previous research on influencing factors that impact upon coaches' exploration and assessment practice is (a) scarce, (b) concerns the coaching practices in general rather than the initial exploration in particular, and (c) that extant findings are neither consistent nor sufficient, we seek to answer the following research question:

RQ3. How do coaches' academic background, gender, coaching experience, coach training, and coaching approach influence the reported frequency of methods applied and topics addressed during the initial exploration?

Method

Measures

A survey instrument identifying coaching practices during the initial exploration phase of workplace coaching was created for this study. Building on findings from the qualitative study conducted by Kotte et al. (2018) as well as the synthesis of findings and theoretical

considerations outlined in the review of the literature above, we generated a list of items of exploration behaviors (i.e., applied methods and addressed topics). The resulting survey included 60 items that describe coaching practices during the initial exploration. All items begin with the introduction 'During the initial exploration, …'. Items concerning methods that coaches apply during the initial exploration included, for example: 'I use imagination techniques', 'I verbalize the emotions of my coachee', or 'I use/work with multisource or 360-degree-feedback'. Items relating to topics that are addressed during the exploration phase included, for example: 'I explore the team constellations in which my coachee is embedded', 'I explore the current family situation of my coachee (e.g., own family, parents)', or 'I explore the motives of my coachee'. Items were framed in terms of the frequency with which a coach engages in each practice or addresses respective topics during the initial exploration, using a five-point scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, 5 = *always*). We conducted a pilot test of our survey with ten experienced workplace coaches with diverse backgrounds (in regard to academic degree, additional coach/psychotherapy training, current professional occupation, years of coaching experience) to be certain that our survey items were phrased in such a way that would make sense to workplace coaches. Participants in the pilot test were asked to take the survey and provide feedback regarding format, content, and the time needed to complete the survey. Based on their responses, appropriate refinements were made. Furthermore, the survey included socio-demographic questions. We asked about coaches' gender, age, educational background (i.e., academic degree, additional coach and psychotherapy training; 'yes' or 'no'), coaching experience in years, and coaching approach ('Do you feel that you are affiliated with one or several coaching approaches, and if so, to what extent?' A scale from 1 = *does not apply at all* to 5 = *applies completely* was given; multiple responses were possible). We also asked for information about their typical coaching engagements (e.g., duration).

Sample

Description of coaches.   Workplace coaches from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland were recruited via newsletters of national and international coaching associations as well as posts in discussion groups of national and international professional social networks (i.e., LinkedIn and XING). In total, 218 coaches completed our survey. Participants were on average 52.7 years old ($SD = 9.80$) and reported an average coaching experience of 11.2 years ($SD = 9.10$). Table 1 summarizes further demographic characteristics of the survey participants in relation to gender, country of coaching practice, academic background, additional training (i.e., coach and/or psychotherapy training), and coaching approach.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE
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Our study sample is largely representative of the German-speaking coaching market as regards gender, age, and coaching experience (Middendorf, 2018; Passmore et al., 2018). The agreement on affiliation with certain coaching approaches correlated significantly ($p < .001$) between $r = .28$ (systemic and psychoanalytic/psychodynamic coaching approach) and .60 (positive psychology and person-centered coaching approach). Sixty-five participants (29.8%) indicated that they do not ascribe to a specific coaching approach.

Description of coaching processes.   Of the 165 coaches who indicated the length of a typical coaching process, they reported an average of 7.93 sessions ($SD = 4.16$) of 90 minutes each, ranging from one to 30 sessions. Coaches reported that it is usually the coachee's organization (61.9%) or the coachee him- or herself that pays for the coaching (26.6%), while sometimes it is also others (e.g., education provider, employment agency) that pay for the coaching (11.5%).

Results

The data were analyzed using R 4.0.2 (R Core Team, 2020). We first report the results of the principal component analysis (*RQ1*), followed by the results of a descriptive analysis (*RQ2*), and lastly, the results from multiple regression analyses (*RQ3*).

Results of principal component analysis: Dimensions of coaches' exploration practices (RQ1)

A principal component analysis (PCA) was performed to determine the underlying dimensions of the item set on reported exploration practices. An examination of scree plots and eigenvalues was used to determine the appropriate number of underlying factors. It was decided to retain five components that accounted for 37% of the variance. A promax rotation was employed. Table 2 displays the results of the PCA. Any items that failed to reach a loading threshold of .40 for any component were dropped from subsequent analyses; therefore only loadings of .40 or higher are displayed. In addition, we excluded all items exhibiting substantial cross-loadings (i.e., secondary loading on any component $\geq$ .30). Twenty-three out of 60 items failed to load substantially on any component in the PCA and were therefore excluded. The resulting five components correlate between $r = .09$ (Components 1 and 3, $p = .19$) and .53 (Components 1 and 5, $p < .001$). The five components encompass two content-related components (Components 1 and 2), two methods-related components (Components 3 and 4), and one mixed component (i.e., content and methods) on the clarification of coaching issues and goals (Component 5). Based on these components, we scored the respective items as subscales.

Component 1 was labeled *Exploration of professional context* and is defined by seven items on how the coach explores their coachees' professional position, tasks and responsibilities, team constellation, role expectations, and industry/field dynamics. Component 1 explains 8% of variance. Cronbach's alpha of the subscale was .79.

Component 2 was labeled *Exploration of personal context* and is characterized by nine items on how the coach explores their coachees' family background (i.e., family of origin), current family situation, health, work-life balance, and previous attempts to approach their coaching issue. Component 2 explains 8% of variance. Cronbach's alpha of the resulting subscale was .84.

Component 3 was identified as *Use of standardized methods*. This component was formed by six items on the frequency with which coaches make use of personality/interest or performance/ability tests, multisource or 360-degree-feedback, performance assessments, job shadowing, and how much the coach is guided by their own affective reactions (item with negative loading; item was reversed). Component 3 explains 6% of variance. Cronbach's alpha of these items was .72.

Component 4 was labeled *Use of active and creative methods* and is defined by six items on the coach's use of creative materials, constellations with figures or objects, imagination techniques, and visualization. Component 3 explains 7% of variance. Cronbach's alpha of this subscale was .83.

Component 5 was identified as *Clarification of coaching issues and goals* and is characterized by nine items on how the coach explores their coachees' 'hidden' coaching topics, motives, values, goals, and desired changes; the coaches' use of active listening, paraphrasing, and verbalizing the coachee's emotions; and how the coach pays attention to peculiarities in their coachees' description of themselves and the coaching issues. Component 5 explains 8% of variance. Cronbach's alpha of this subscale was .70.

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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE
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Results of descriptive analysis: Reported frequency of exploration practices (RQ2)

Figure 1 summarizes the range of ratings of items for each component in a boxplot. The figure displays the median and interquartile range as well as the most and least extreme scores of each component (Field et al., 2012).

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE
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We further calculated the means, standard deviations, and percentage of the coaches' average agreement (i.e., ratings of 4 = *often* or 5 = *always*) versus disagreement (i.e., ratings of 1 = *never* or 2 = *rarely*) for the items of each component. Altogether, items of Component 1 (*Exploration of professional context*) had an average rating of 4.38 (*SD* = 0.58) and thus the highest average rating of all components. Whereas 84% of coaches explore the coachees' professional context *often* or *always*, only 6% reported doing this *rarely* or *never*. Component 2 (*Exploration of personal context*) had an average rating of 3.72 (*SD* = 0.68). Whereas 60% of surveyed coaches indicated exploring aspects of their coachees' personal contexts *often* or *always*, 16% indicated doing so only *rarely* or *never*. Component 3 (*Use of standardized methods*) reached a mean of 1.84 (*SD* = 0.64) and, hence, the lowest average rating of all components. While on average 74% of coaches reported using standardized methods *rarely* or *never*, only 8% of survey participants indicated that they utilized them *often* or *always* during their initial exploration. Accordingly, using one's own affective reactions (i.e., the only item of this component with negative loading) was indicated as frequently used by 77% of our sample and only by 6% as *rarely* or *never*. The mean of Component 4 (*Use of active and creative methods*) amounts to 3.03 (*SD* = 0.81). Items of this component yield the highest standard deviation of all components. While on average 37% of participants expressed that they utilize active and creative methods on average *often* or *always*, 33% of coaches indicated using them *rarely* or *never*. Lastly, Component 5 (*Clarification of coaching issues and goals*) reached a mean of 4.31 (*SD* = 0.46). Of all respondents, 84% indicated that they used

practices described in the component *often* or *always* during the initial exploration, while only 4% of coaches indicated doing so *rarely* or *never*.

Results of multiple linear regression analyses: Influence of coaches' background on reported exploration practices (RQ3)

To test whether the coaches' background (gender, years of coaching experience, academic degree, coach/psychotherapy training, and preferred coaching approach) has an impact on their reported initial exploration practices, multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. The means of the component subscales were used as dependent variables. Gender, years of coaching experience, academic training (academic degree in psychology, business, social sciences/education, other degree, or no academic degree), additional training (coach or psychotherapy training), and affiliation with certain coaching approaches (cognitive-behavioral, Gestalt, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), person-centered, positive psychology, psychoanalytic/psychodynamic, psychodrama, systemic, and transactional analysis) were used as independent variables. Table 3 shows the correlation matrix of all variables. For subsequent analyses, metric variables were standardized (exploration practices, coaching experience, affiliation with certain coaching approaches) and categorical variables were either effect-coded (gender, additional training) or contrast-coded (academic degree). In the regression models, all possible predictors were included in order to examine which variables have an effect beyond the others (i.e., holding all other predictors constant).

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INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE
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A visual inspection suggested that the assumption of homoscedasticity of linear models might have been violated. Hence, we examined robust regression results by using the Huber-White sandwich standard error estimator. However, this did not change any of the results. We therefore report the uncorrected linear regression models.

Predictors explained 17% of the variance of Component 1 (*Exploration of professional context*, see Table 4). Significant predictors were coaching experience (β = .24, p = .002), having a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic coaching approach (β = .22, p = .007), and having an NLP coaching approach (β = -.21, p = .028). Holding all other coach variables constant, the more coaching experience the coaches have or the more strongly they identify with a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic coaching approach, respectively, the more they explore the professional context of the coachee. In contrast, the more the coach follows an NLP coaching approach, the less they explore the coachee's professional context.

No significant predictor emerged in the regression model (R^2 = .04) of Component 2 (*Exploration of personal context*). The given set of independent variables thus did not account for variance in this component.

The regression model of Component 3 (*Use of standardized methods*) resulted in R^2 = .23 (see Table 5). When controlling for all predictors, having a degree in social studies/education (β = -.39, p = .016), coach training (β = .18, p = .048), a transactional analysis coaching approach (β = .25, p = .004), a cognitive-behavioral coaching approach (β = .25, p = .006), and a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic coaching approach (β = -.19, p = .015) showed significant effects. This means that coaches with a degree in social studies/education utilize standardized methods significantly less frequently than coaches with other degrees or no academic degree. Coaches who had attended coach training use standardized methods more frequently during the initial exploration than coaches without coach training. Furthermore, the more strongly coaches identify with a cognitive-behavioral or transactional analysis coaching approach, the more often standardized methods are used, whereas the more coaches identify with a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic coaching approach, the less often standardized methods are used.

Component 4 (*Use of active and creative methods*) reached an R^2 of .13 (see Table 6). The only significant predictor is having a degree in social sciences/education (β = .42,

$p = .017$). Coaches who studied social sciences/education use active and creative methods during the initial exploration significantly more often than coaches with another (i.e., psychology, business, or other) or no academic degree.

The regression analysis of Component 5 (*Clarification of coaching issues and goals*) resulted in $R^2 = .12$ (see Table 7). The only significant predictor that emerged is identification with a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic coaching approach ($\beta = -.18$, $p = .027$). The more coaches identify with this coaching approach, the less frequently they apply the practices by which this component is characterized.

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INSERT TABLES 4, 5, 6, 7 ABOUT HERE
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Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine how coaches report on their procedure during the initial exploration of workplace coaching. We aimed to provide an overview of potential coaching exploration practices (i.e., content that is addressed and methods that are applied), to present the reported frequency of such practices from the coaches' perspectives, and to examine how the coaches' backgrounds relate to reported exploration practices.

Summary of findings

Using a principal component analysis, we found a structure of five components that describe reported coaching practices during the initial exploration of workplace coaching. More specifically, we identified two content-related components, namely, the exploration of the coachee's *professional context* (Component 1) and *personal context* (Component 2), two methods-related components, namely, the use of *standardized methods* (Component 3) and *active and creative methods* (Component 4), and a fifth mixed component, namely, *clarification of coaching issues and goals* (Component 5). Whereas the majority of coaches surveyed indicated that they frequently clarify the coachee's issues and goals and explore both

the coachee's professional and personal contexts, they only rarely utilize standardized methods and vary substantially in their use of active and creative methods.

The coaches' background (i.e., gender, academic degree, coaching experience, additional coach or psychotherapy training, and preferred coaching approach) did not predict how frequently coaches explore their coachee's personal context ($R^2 = .04$). The regression models of the coaches' background were most predictive of using standardized methods ($R^2 = .23$), followed by exploration of professional context ($R^2 = .17$), using active and creative methods ($R^2 = .13$), and clarification of coaching issues and goals ($R^2 = .12$). According to Cohen (1988), these can be interpreted as small to moderate effects. Variables that emerged as significant predictors were the coach's coaching experience, whether the coach had an academic degree in social studies/education, whether the coach had undergone coach training, and the coach's affiliation with particular coaching approaches (i.e., psychoanalytic/ psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, transactional analysis, and NLP).

Dimensions of exploration practices and their reported frequency

The exploration practices of coaches are shown to be characterized by five dimensions which differ in popularity (i.e., reported frequency of application) across the surveyed coaches. Concerning the dimensions of clarification of the coachee's coaching issues and goals (e.g., their motives) and the exploration of the coachee's professional context (e.g., their professional position), the vast majority of survey participants indicated doing so on a frequent basis. Workplace coaching is defined as a developmental intervention with the aim of achieving the professional goals of the coachee and his or her organization (e.g., Bozer & Jones, 2018; Jones et al., 2016). It is therefore not surprising that coaches report that they put an emphasis on understanding their coachee's issues and goals as well as their coachees' professional context during the initial exploration. More remarkable is the finding that the majority of surveyed coaches indicated that they also explore the coachee's personal context

during the initial exploration. Our results are in agreement with previous work that has postulated the relevance of 'constructing a full picture of the client' (Stober, 2006, p. 33), in other words, exploring both the work *and* private contexts of coachees (Barner, 2006).

The results of our online survey therefore corroborate the initial findings of the interview study by Kotte and colleagues (2018). In both studies, the majority of coaches indicated that they not only seek to understand their coachee (e.g., their issues and goals) and focus on exploring the current professional situation of their coachees but also that they examine their personal context and work-life interfaces.

Our findings are also in line with the findings by Kotte et al. (2018) regarding coaches' methodological approach. While they vary in their use of active and creative methods during the initial exploration, they seldom use standardized methods. More specifically, most of the coaches indicated using standardized methods (i.e., psychometric tests or organizational data, e.g., 360-degree-feedback) only *rarely* or *never* during the initial exploration. Contrary to our findings, using psychometric tests was previously reported as a very popular coaching assessment practice among coaches from the US and UK (e.g., Del Giudice et al., 2014; McDowall & Smewing, 2009). The discrepancy between our findings and previous findings could relate both to the differing focuses and cultural aspects. First, in contrast to previous studies which did not specify *when* the assessment practice takes place during the coaching engagement, we explicitly focused on coaching practices during the *initial* exploration. Therefore, coaches might use standardized tests or multisource assessment tools more frequently at later points during the coaching engagement. Second, cultural aspects could also play a role in explaining our findings. Taking into consideration previous findings that, in Germany, psychological tests are only seldom used in human resource management and business practice in general (e.g., in personnel selection; Benit & Soellner, 2013), our findings might also reflect a general reluctance on the part of practitioners from German-speaking countries to use standardized tests. Furthermore, some test providers require test users to

either have a degree in psychology or a related field, or become specifically certified in their instruments (e.g., Hogrefe, 2020). Given that only 20% of our survey participants were psychologists, this might be an additional obstacle for coaches when it comes to using standardized tests in their exploration practice.

Regarding the five components identified through our analysis, it should be noted that 23 out of the total of 60 items generated to describe initial exploration practices did not load substantially (i.e., $\geq .40$) on any component and were therefore rather independent of the identified components. Seven of those items had on average very high frequency ratings (i.e., $M > 4.50$ on a five-point Likert scale). The variance might therefore have been too low to load on a specific component. Some of the other items might not have been characterized well by the five components. For example, items consisted of the exploration of the coaching context (e.g., involvement of other stakeholders), the coach-coachee relationship (e.g., trust between coach and coachee, fit of coach's expertise), using specific techniques (e.g., generating and discussing working hypotheses), and assessment of coaching as the right intervention (e.g., coaching vs. psychotherapy as the right intervention) among others.

Influence of coaches' background on the reported frequency of exploration practices
We analyzed whether the coaches' demographics and educational background (i.e., gender, coaching experience, academic degree, additional training, and coaching approach) could account for differences in exploration practices. Predictors accounted for 12% (*clarification of coaching issues and goals*) to 23% (*using standardized methods*) of variance. Therefore, a coach's background significantly predicts how he or she will conduct some aspects of the initial exploration to some extent. However, 77 to 88% of variance in reported exploration practices *could not* be explained by variables of the coach's background. Moreover, the coach's background did not explain any variance in the coach's *exploration of coachee's personal context.*

The gender of the coach, having an academic degree (vs. no degree), having a degree in psychology, business, or an unspecified 'other' degree, having undergone psychotherapy training, or ascribing to a number of different coaching approaches (i.e., person-centered, systemic, psychodrama, Gestalt, or positive psychology) did *not* have any significant effects beyond other variables in any of the regression models. Our results therefore stand in contrast to previous research findings on the effects of gender or psychology versus business degrees on specific methodological aspects of coaching practice, for example, goal setting or using personality tests or multisource feedback assessment (Bono et al., 2009; David et al., 2014; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008; Newsom & Dent, 2011). We also could not confirm that coaches with a psychology (vs. business) degree focus more on the personal issues of the coachee than on professional topics (Bono et al., 2009; Marsden, 2010). Our findings are therefore more in line with studies that found only small or non-significant differences in coaching practices as a function of academic background (e.g., Bastian, 2015). Bono et al. (2009) discuss small differences between the practices of psychologist versus non-psychologist coaches against the background that there were as many differences among psychologist coaches of differing disciplines (e.g., clinical vs. industrial-organizational psychologists) as there were between psychologists and non-psychologists. Coaches in our sample might have been too diverse in their specializations within each type of academic degree to show uniformity in exploration practices compared to coaches with other academic backgrounds.

Furthermore, Ellam-Dyson and Palmer (2008, p. 82) point out that 'coaching often involves an eclectic approach, where more than one technique or strategy is used.' This is confirmed by relatively high correlations among all coaching approaches in our data (ranging from $r = .28$ to $.60$, $p < .001$) and might explain the overall weak effects of the coaching approach on the reported initial exploration behavior of our study participants. Nevertheless, the identification with some of the coaching approaches partly predicted reported initial

exploration behavior. Concerning the use of standardized methods, the more coaches identified with a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic coaching approach, the less they reported using them during the initial exploration, whereas it was the other way around for identification with both a cognitive-behavioral and a transactional analysis coaching approach. Our finding that coaches with either a cognitive-behavioral or a transactional analysis coaching approach use more standardized methods is in accordance with others (e.g., Ducharme, 2004; Napper & Newton, 2018). Napper and Newton (2018) discuss that focusing on contracting and conducting a measurable evaluation of return on investment with coaching are distinctive features of the transactional analysis coaching approach. This is similar to Ducharme (2004) who argues that cognitive-behavioral coaches seek to reach measurable results for coaching engagements. Coaches with these specific backgrounds might generally apply more standardized methods to quantify changes to the coachee before and after the coaching. Therefore they might, for example, use psychometric tests during the initial exploration more frequently than coaches with other coaching approaches. The relationship between a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic coaching approach and less-frequent use of standardized methods on the one hand, and more exploration of the professional context on the other hand, is in line with how this coaching approach is characterized. For instance, Lee (2018) describes how, in psychodynamic coaching, the coach examines the coachee through practices such as countertransference (i.e., tuning into feelings, bodily sensations, and thoughts unconsciously evoked in the coach by the coachee) which stand in contrast to standardized methods. Furthermore, Allcorn (2006, p. 129) argues that before exploring anything else, psychoanalytically informed coaching requires 'context setting'. More precisely, he postulates that deeper explorations (e.g., regarding the coachee's relational patterns) must be grounded in the coach's previously gained understanding of the coachee's organization (e.g., its culture, history, and operating challenges). This might also explain the negative relationship between a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic coaching approach and the

clarification of the coaching issues and goals. Coaches with this particular affiliation might refrain from determining the focus and establishing goals early-on during the coaching process because of the potential risk of narrowing down the coaching prematurely and thereby limiting the space for less conscious layers of meaning to emerge.

Concerning academic degrees, only a background in social studies/education predicted aspects of coaches' initial exploration practices. Coaches with a degree in social studies/ education thus differed from those with other degrees in relation to their methodological approach to the initial exploration. Whereas they use standardized methods significantly less frequently, they use active and creative methods more frequently than coaches with another or no academic background. On the level of content, in contrast to previous discussions (e.g., Bono et al., 2009; Marsden, 2010), we did not find that coaches with a social studies/ education degree focus more strongly on the personal (vs. professional) issues of their coachees compared to coaches with another academic background. Our findings contribute to widening the debate on the role of coaches' academic backgrounds as potential factors that might account for differences in coaches' exploration practices beyond the differentiation of coaches with psychology versus business backgrounds.

Having completed coach training only emerged as a significant predictor for using standardized methods during the initial exploration. Coaching practitioners with specific coach training possibly apply standardized methods more frequently than coaches without such training (i.e., coaches who learned by experience alone) because coach training programs might entail being trained in the application of specific standardized methods (e.g., 360-degree-feedback measures, personality tests) and coaches might then implement them in the field. Experience as a coach only impacted (positively) on the exploration of the coachees' professional context. This finding might indicate that more-experienced coaches are possibly better equipped to differentiate between coaching and other interventions (e.g., psychotherapy) and hence they focus more on professional issues in workplace coaching.

Taken together, the results of our study indicate that the educational background and the amount of coaching experience have a rather small impact on most reported exploration practices by the surveyed coaches. The coaching market comprises 'a mixed bag of individuals (…), sometimes without obvious education or experience related to the service' (Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008, p. 20). However, one could argue that information access and exposure to the many aspects of the coaching field (e.g., through attending conferences) might lead to similar coaching practices across coaches, regardless of their educational background (Bastian, 2015). Our findings might therefore indicate the growing maturity of the coaching industry. More specifically, we argue in line with Bastian (2015) that consistency within (exploration) practices among coaches challenges the perspective of the coaching industry as a 'Wild West' and rather supports the idea that coaches might not work as diversely as previously suspected.

Limitations

Although a survey allows for the collection of data across a large sample of workplace coaches, standardized questions and responses limit the ability to collect rich data on the intricacies of coaches' work with their coachees, which can be hard to characterize on a 1–5 response scale (e.g., Bono et al., 2009). Moreover, we asked coaches about frequencies regarding their *usual* or *typical* coaching practice. This instruction leads coaches to provide average ratings across different coaching engagements when coaches probably behave in a case-by-case manner. For instance, the specific exploration practices used by the coach might depend on the reason why the coachee takes part in coaching. So while our study provides an overview of initial exploration practices, coaches' procedures on a case-by-case basis, as discussed in previous studies (e.g., Kotte et al., 2018), could not be captured with our study design.

Understanding the contribution of the coach is valuable both from an academic and practical perspective (Gettman et al., 2019). However, given that coaching constitutes a relationship-based, dynamic collaboration (e.g., Bozer & Jones, 2018; Gettman et al., 2019), the fact that we only investigated the coach perspective on coaching practices during the initial exploration entails some limitations. By only collecting self-reports from coaches, we cannot rule out the possible effect of social desirability. Coaches might have answered the questions by considering their ideal coach-self rather than by describing how they actually proceed during the initial exploration. In other words, it is possible that some participants may have responded in a way that was consistent with how they thought they *should* respond (e.g., based on their training or what they read about coaching practices in the coaching literature). Moreover, coaches may vary in terms of how accurately they are able to describe their own practices (e.g., Bastian, 2015; Ellam-Dyson & Palmer, 2008).

While our focus on the *initial* exploration in coaching is highly relevant in light of previous findings, we are aware of the difficulties of somewhat artificially separating the initial exploration from the rest of the coaching process. In coaching practice, the boundary is most likely not as clear-cut as we have tried to make it appear for theoretical and conceptual purposes. Therefore we cannot rule out the possibility that study participants did not understand or ignored the instructions and at least partly reported coaching practices beyond the initial exploration.

Outlook on future research

As discussed above, asking coaches themselves about how they practice coaching exploration can be considered a necessary first step (e.g., Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Gettman et al., 2019), but coaches' answers might be biased both motivationally (i.e., due to social desirability) or due to difficulties in describing their coaching practice accurately. Future research should therefore complement the coaches' perspective with the perspective of

coachees. For example, future studies could ask both coach and coachee to fill out questionnaires about the coach's initial exploration practices directly after the initial coaching session(s). Furthermore, ratings from an objective perspective (i.e., behavioral observer ratings) of recorded first coaching sessions should be conducted, for example, by using the items of our questionnaire as a template for the rating system. This would also respond to previous criticism that coaching research trails far behind psychotherapy research in terms of the use of behavioral data (e.g., Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015). With more reliable information on coaches' exploration practices, future studies could set out to investigate the relationship between initial exploration practices and coaching outcome. In particular, it would be relevant to investigate whether there is a relationship between specific exploration practices and coaching outcome, and which moderating factors impact upon this relationship.

While we focused on coach characteristics that might impact upon initial exploration practices, our results also point to additional influencing factors. In particular, in line with recent calls to take the context of coaching more strongly into account (e.g., Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018), future studies should investigate the coaching context. In terms of the organizational context, it is likely that the organizational embeddedness (e.g., whether the coaching is paid by the organization or the coachee him- or herself) impacts upon the content addressed (e.g., private vs. professional issues) and methods applied (e.g., use of organizational data) during the initial exploration.

Additionally, given the hints in our study and previous research at possible cultural effects on using specific coaching practices (e.g., David et al, 2014) and the fact that coach characteristics vary within the international coaching market (e.g., Passmore et al., 2018), our survey should be conducted in other countries in order to identify any possible cultural effects on specific exploration practices.

Implications

Our study provides practitioners with a detailed overview of the exploration practices of German-speaking coaches. It provides coaches with an opportunity to compare their own coaching exploration practices with the range of exploration practices used by others. Taking into account the five components of the initial exploration and the respective items by which they are characterized, coaches can raise their awareness of their own perceptual habits and blind spots and thus critically reflect upon their own practice. Moreover, coaches can detect differences that might distinguish themselves from others and thus identify their own unique approach to the initial exploration. This knowledge might be useful for engaging with potential coachees and organizational coaching purchasers.

For providers of coach training programs, our study yields an overview of the range of common coaching practices during the initial exploration that can be taught within the curriculum. Our findings can also be beneficial to potential coachees by delineating methods that coaches might utilize and topics they might address during the initial exploration. Coachees would thus know what to expect and be able to make better-informed decisions when choosing a coach, given that coach-coachee-fit is considered to affect coaching success (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). Furthermore, HR professionals, who are supposed to choose the 'right' coaches for their organization, can use our five components as a framework for decision-making. For instance, this framework can be used for interviewing coaches about their exploration practices to check whether their expectations are met regarding the exploration practices a coach should (or should not) apply in working with their employees (e.g., using standardized or creative tools and methods, the degree of focus on the personal issues of the coachee) or, more specifically, for matching coach and coachee when initiating a coaching engagement.

Conclusion

This study investigated coaching practices during the initial exploration of workplace coaching. Findings suggest a way of conceptualizing exploration practices in workplace coaching through five components and point to similarities and differences in reported exploration practices across coaches. Whereas some characteristics of the coaches' background significantly predict the reported frequency of exploration practices to some extent, there remains substantial variance that could not be explained by coach characteristics alone. Future research should therefore take contextual factors into account and investigate the relationship between exploration practices and coaching outcome.

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Table 1

Demographics and background of survey participants

Demographic characteristic	Percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	39.9
Female	60.1
Country of coaching practice*	
Germany	61.9
Austria	39.0
Other (e.g., Switzerland, UK)	14.7
Educational background*	
Vocational training (e.g., nursing, banking)	26.1
Academic degree in social sciences/education	25.2
Academic degree in business	23.8
Academic degree in psychology	20.2
Academic degree in another discipline (e.g., linguistics, theology, engineering)	42.2
Doctoral degree	11.9
Coach or psychotherapy training*	
Completed coach training	84.9
Currently enrolled in coach training	11.0
Completed psychotherapy training	19.3
Coaching approach*	
Systemic	70.2
Person-centered	42.6
Transactional analysis	32.1
Positive psychology	27.6
Psychoanalytic/psychodynamic	23.9
Gestalt	23.4
Psychodrama	21.6
Cognitive-behavioral	20.6
Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP)	14.7
No specific coaching approach	29.8

Note. $N = 218$. *: Multiple selection was possible. For variables of coaching approach, the percentage of survey participants who indicated (strong) agreement on affiliation with the respective coaching approach (i.e., ratings of 4 or 5 on a five-point-Likert scale) is reported.

Table 2

Results of principal component analysis

Item description	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	h²	M	SD
I explore…								
the coachee's professional position	.90					.56	4.76	0.65
the coachee's industry/field	.85					.57	4.29	0.95
the coachee's team constellation	.84					.55	4.50	0.79
the coachee's professional tasks and responsibilities	.78					.46	4.79	0.53
the impact of organizational or field dynamics on the coachee	.69					.53	3.99	1.06
the coachee's role expectations and role conflicts	.64					.43	4.45	0.73
why I was selected as coach	.41					.27	3.90	1.21
the coachee's current family situation		.79				.57	3.47	1.20
recurring patterns within the coachee's life		.71				.53	3.72	1.01
the coachee's family background (family of origin)		.69				.47	2.97	1.18
the coachee's health		.68				.49	3.85	1.07
the coachee's work-life balance		.62				.40	4.04	0.85
the coachee's voluntary or leisure activities		.60				.46	3.08	1.11
the coachee's personality characteristics		.54				.50	3.72	1.09
the coachee's previous attempts to address the coaching issue		.47				.29	4.35	0.82
whether the coachee has previously sought help/support		.40				.31	4.22	0.93
I use…								
personality and interest inventories/tests			.64			.50	2.02	1.19
my own affective reactions*			.62			.48	4.15	0.93
performance and ability tests			.58			.38	1.48	0.82
results of performance assessments or potential analyses			.57			.36	1.96	0.99
multisource or 360-degree-feedback			.55			.37	2.06	1.07
job shadowing or participant observation(s)			.43			.23	1.69	0.93
constellations				.92		.63	2.98	1.15
creative materials				.87		.60	2.51	1.21
role-playing				.86		.61	2.77	1.07
inner plurality methods				.79		.51	3.00	1.13
imagination techniques				.74		.49	2.85	1.11
visualization				.47		.27	4.06	0.94
I pay attention to peculiarities in the coachee's descriptions (non-verbal/ verbal)					.79	.43	4.56	0.67

Item description	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	h²	M	SD
I listen actively					.73	.32	4.38	0.78
I verbalize the coachee's emotions					.59	.28	4.20	0.80
I explore the coachee's 'hidden' coaching topic					.59	.39	4.51	0.75
I explore the coachee's motives					.57	.46	4.17	0.85
I explore the coachee's norms and values					.45	.44	3.81	1.02
I identify the coachee's most important coaching goal(s)					.44	.35	4.50	0.76
I paraphrase					.42	.18	3.99	0.97
I explore the coachee's desired post-coaching changes					.41	.36	4.70	0.67
I explore the coachee's coaching issue							4.89	0.42
I explore the coachee's coaching goal(s)							4.78	0.48
I clarify the coachee's coaching focus							4.60	0.60
I explore whether trust exists between the coachee and me							4.80	0.50
I explore the coachee's expectations and fears							4.70	0.60
I pay attention to peculiarities in the coachee's descriptions (content)			-.35		.91	.50	4.69	0.54
I explore the coachee's strengths and resources							4.60	0.70
I explore the coachee's coaching motivation							4.60	0.80
I explore the coachee's problems and difficulties		.41			.32	.33	4.49	0.78
I explore whether my expertise fits							4.40	0.90
I use my own cognitive reactions			-.52		.37	.40	4.30	0.82
I assess: Coaching (vs. psychotherapy) as the right intervention							4.14	1.13
I use systemic questions							4.28	0.90
I ask (the coachee) about the perspectives of other stakeholders							4.10	1.00
I generate working hypotheses							4.06	1.02
I explore the coachee's career path	.57	.32				.45	4.04	1.01
I discuss working hypotheses with the coachee							4.01	1.01
I am guided by intuition			-.49		.45	.35	4.00	0.78
I am guided by theoretical knowledge							3.77	0.95
I explain methods used							3.76	1.21
I assess: Coaching (vs. career/ personnel consultation) as the right intervention							3.31	1.42

	2.70	1.10
I directly involve other stakeholders	2.70	1.10
I use (semi-)structured interview forms (e.g., career anchors, biographical interview)	2.70	1.10

Note. *N* = 218. C1: Exploration of professional context; C2: Exploration of personal context; C3: Use of standardized methods; C4: Use of active and creative methods; C5: Clarification of coaching issues and goals. Primary loadings ≥ .40 and secondary loading on any component ≥ .30 are displayed.

Table 3

Correlation matrix of components and predictor variables

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	Exp	Sex	CT	PT	No AD	Psy	Bus	Soc	O AD	CB	Ges	NLP	PC	Pos	PA	PD	Sys	TA
C1	-																						
C2	**.39**	-																					
C3	.04	**.24**	-																				
C4	**.16**	**.24**	.07	-																			
C5	**.29**	**.43**	**.19**	**.31**	-																		
Exp	**.28**	-.06	**-.13**	.03	-.12	-																	
Sex	.10	-.03	.09	-.10	-.13	**.21**	-																
CT	.01	-.03	**.14**	.11	.00	.08	.00	-															
PT	.12	-.05	**-.18**	-.03	**-.21**	**.36**	.13	-.02	-														
No AD	-.03	.05	.09	.04	.00	-.10	-.06	.12	-.06	-													
Psy	-.03	-.03	-.02	-.07	-.12	.03	.06	-.07	**.19**	**-.15**	-												
Bus	-.02	.06	**.16**	.01	.02	-.10	.07	.06	-.11	**-.16**	**-.17**	-											
Soc	**.16**	-.05	**-.28**	**.18**	.02	**.16**	-.07	-.05	.01	**-.17**	**-.16**	**-.18**	-										
O AD	-.02	-.04	-.03	-.03	.09	-.02	.09	-.04	-.05	**-.24**	**-.32**	**-.29**	**-.18**	-									
CB	-.12	.10	**.14**	.12	-.03	-.02	-.06	-.04	.00	.10	.07	.00	-.08	.00	-								
Ges	-.04	.00	-.05	**.22**	-.03	.09	-.11	-.03	.04	**.15**	.06	-.11	.01	-.02	**.56**	-							
NLP	**-.19**	.04	.02	**.18**	.02	-.06	**-.19**	-.04	-.05	**.20**	.01	.07	-.10	-.11	**.53**	**.53**	-						
PC	-.05	.10	-.06	.10	.05	-.03	**-.18**	-.12	.03	.04	.01	.00	.07	-.02	**.57**	**.50**	**.34**	-					
Pos	**-.16**	.12	.03	**.14**	.10	**-.16**	**-.22**	-.08	-.10	.09	.08	.06	-.04	-.11	**.57**	**.42**	**.53**	**.60**	-				
PA	**.14**	.01	**-.18**	.04	**-.15**	.12	-.09	-.09	**.13**	.04	-.01	-.13	.09	.02	**.41**	**.50**	**.36**	**.37**	**.30**	-			
PD	-.04	.02	-.09	**.17**	-.03	.07	-.11	-.12	.09	.02	.03	-.05	.03	-.03	**.52**	**.58**	**.56**	**.51**	**.50**	**.52**	-		
Sys	-.04	.07	-.05	**.21**	.11	-.02	-.13	.09	-.04	.03	-.05	.04	.05	.02	**.40**	**.43**	**.40**	**.41**	**.44**	**.28**	**.42**	-	
TA	-.04	.10	**.14**	.11	.10	-.04	**-.16**	-.12	**-.15**	.12	-.11	.03	-.02	.00	**.50**	**.50**	**.47**	**.48**	**.49**	**.40**	**.49**	**.44**	-

Note. Significant correlations ($p < .05$) are highlighted in bold. C1: Exploration of professional context; C2: Exploration of personal context; C3: Use of standardized methods; C4: Use of active and creative methods; C5: Clarification of coaching issues and goals; Exp: Coaching experience (years); Sex: Gender (dummy coded: 0 = "female", 1 = "male"); CT: Coach training (dummy coded: 0 = "no", 1 = "yes"); PT: Psychotherapy training (dummy coded: 0 = "no", 1 = "yes"); No AD: No academic degree (dummy coded: 0 = "no degree", 1 = "academic degree"); Psy: Psychology degree (dummy coded: 0 = "no", 1 = "yes"); Bus: Business degree (dummy coded: 0 = "no", 1 = "yes"); Soc: Social/education degree (dummy coded: 0 = "no", 1 = "yes"); O AD: Other academic degree (dummy coded: 0 = "no", 1 = "yes"); Coaching approaches (1 = "low agreement", 5 = "high agreement"): CB: cognitive-behavioral; Ges: Gestalt; NLP: Neuro-linguistic programming; PC: Person-centered; Pos: Positive psychology; PA: Psychoanalytic/psychodynamic; PD: Psychodrama; Sys: Systemic; TA: Transactional analysis.

Table 4

Regression model of Component 1 (Exploration of professional context)

Variable	*β*	*SE*β	*t*	*p*
Intercept	-.04	.11	-0.39	.700
Coaching experience	.24	.07	3.20	.002*
Gender	.03	.07	0.48	.635
Coach training	-.02	.10	-0.21	.836
Psychotherapy training	.00	.09	0.02	.981
Education				
Academic degree	.22	.26	0.83	.409
Psychology	-.28	.30	-0.97	.334
Business	.15	.17	0.84	.400
Social studies/education	.23	.17	-1.35	.180
Coaching approach				
Gestalt	-.06	.09	-0.61	.544
Person-centered	.02	.09	0.21	.838
Cognitive-behavioral	-.08	.10	-0.83	.409
Systemic	.04	.08	0.47	.638
Transactional analysis	.04	.09	0.50	.615
NLP	-.21	.09	-2.21	.028*
Psychodrama	-.01	.10	-0.06	.953
Psychoanalytic/-dynamic	.22	.08	2.75	.007*
Positive psychology	-.04	.10	-0.50	.617

Note. $N = 218$, $R^2 = .17$. Coaching experience and agreement on affiliation with respective coaching approach are standardized. Gender, coach training, and psychotherapy training are effect-coded ("male" and "no training" as reference, respectively). Education variables are contrast-coded (i.e., contrasts test each category against the respective other aggregated categories).

Table 5

Regression model of Component 3 (Use of standardized methods)

Variable	β	SEβ	t	p
Intercept	-.16	.11	-1.53	.127
Coaching experience	-.06	.07	-0.81	.421
Gender	.09	.07	1.26	.209
Coach training	.18	.09	1.99	.048
Psychotherapy training	-.10	.09	-1.16	.248
Education				
Academic degree	.19	.25	0.75	.452
Psychology	-.05	.29	-0.16	.871
Business	.20	.17	1.22	.225
Social studies/education	-.39	.16	-2.43	.016*
Coaching approach				
Gestalt	-.03	.09	-0.37	.713
Person-centered	-.11	.09	-1.27	.207
Cognitive-behavioral	.25	.09	2.77	.006*
Systemic	-.10	.08	-1.27	.204
Transactional analysis	.25	.08	2.92	.004*
NLP	-.04	.09	-0.48	.629
Psychodrama	-.06	.09	-0.66	.512
Psychoanalytic/-dynamic	-.19	.08	-2.44	.015*
Positive psychology	.00	.09	-0.02	.988

Note. $N = 218$, $R^2 = .23$. Coaching experience and agreement on affiliation with respective coaching approach are standardized. Gender, coach training, and psychotherapy training are effect-coded ("male" and "no training" as reference, respectively). Education variables are contrast-coded (i.e., contrasts test each category against the respective other aggregated categories).

Table 6

Regression model of Component 4 (Use of active and creative methods)

Variable	β	SEβ	t	p
Intercept	-.14	.11	-1.20	.231
Coaching experience	.01	.08	0.07	.942
Gender	-.07	.07	-0.95	.345
Coach training	.15	.10	1.54	.125
Psychotherapy training	-.02	.10	-0.20	.846
Education				
Academic degree	-.10	.27	-0.39	.701
Psychology	.14	.31	0.47	.637
Business	.05	.18	0.28	.780
Social studies/education	.42	.17	2.40	.017*
Coaching approach				
Gestalt	.19	.10	1.96	.051
Person-centered	-.08	.10	-0.79	.432
Cognitive-behavioral	.00	.10	-0.02	.984
Systemic	.11	.08	1.35	.180
Transactional analysis	-.02	.09	-0.24	.811
NLP	.06	.09	0.67	.504
Psychodrama	.10	.10	0.99	.325
Psychoanalytic/-dynamic	-.14	.08	-1.65	.100
Positive psychology	.02	.10	0.21	.836

Note. $N = 218$, $R^2 = .13$. Coaching experience and agreement on affiliation with respective coaching approach are standardized. Gender, coach training, and psychotherapy training are effect-coded ("male" and "no training" as reference, respectively). Education variables are contrast-coded (i.e., contrasts test each category against the respective other aggregated categories).

Table 7

Regression model of Component 5 (Clarification of coaching issues and goals)

Variable	β	SEβ	t	p
Intercept	-.13	.11	-1.14	.254
Coaching experience	-.02	.08	0.26	.794
Gender	-.07	.07	-1.00	.318
Coach training	-.01	.10	-0.11	.916
Psychotherapy training	-.17	.10	-1.72	.087
Education				
Academic degree	-.09	.27	-0.35	.727
Psychology	-.25	.31	-0.81	.418
Business	-.19	.18	-1.07	.287
Social studies/education	-.06	.17	-0.36	.722
Coaching approach				
Gestalt	-.03	.10	-0.27	.789
Person-centered	.04	.10	0.44	.663
Cognitive-behavioral	-.11	.10	-1.09	.279
Systemic	.11	.08	1.41	.159
Transactional analysis	.10	.09	1.13	.259
NLP	.02	.10	0.21	.831
Psychodrama	-.04	.10	-0.43	.671
Psychoanalytic/-dynamic	-.18	.08	-2.23	.027*
Positive psychology	.02	.10	0.21	.836

Note. $N = 218$, $R^2 = .12$. Coaching experience and agreement on affiliation with respective coaching approach are standardized. Gender, coach training, and psychotherapy training are effect-coded ("male" and "no training" as reference, respectively). Education variables are contrast-coded (i.e., contrasts test each category against the respective other aggregated categories).

Figure 1

Boxplot of components of initial exploration practices

Note. 1 = 'never', 5 = 'always'

Figure 1

Boxplot of components of initial exploration practices

Note. 1 = 'never', 5 = 'always'
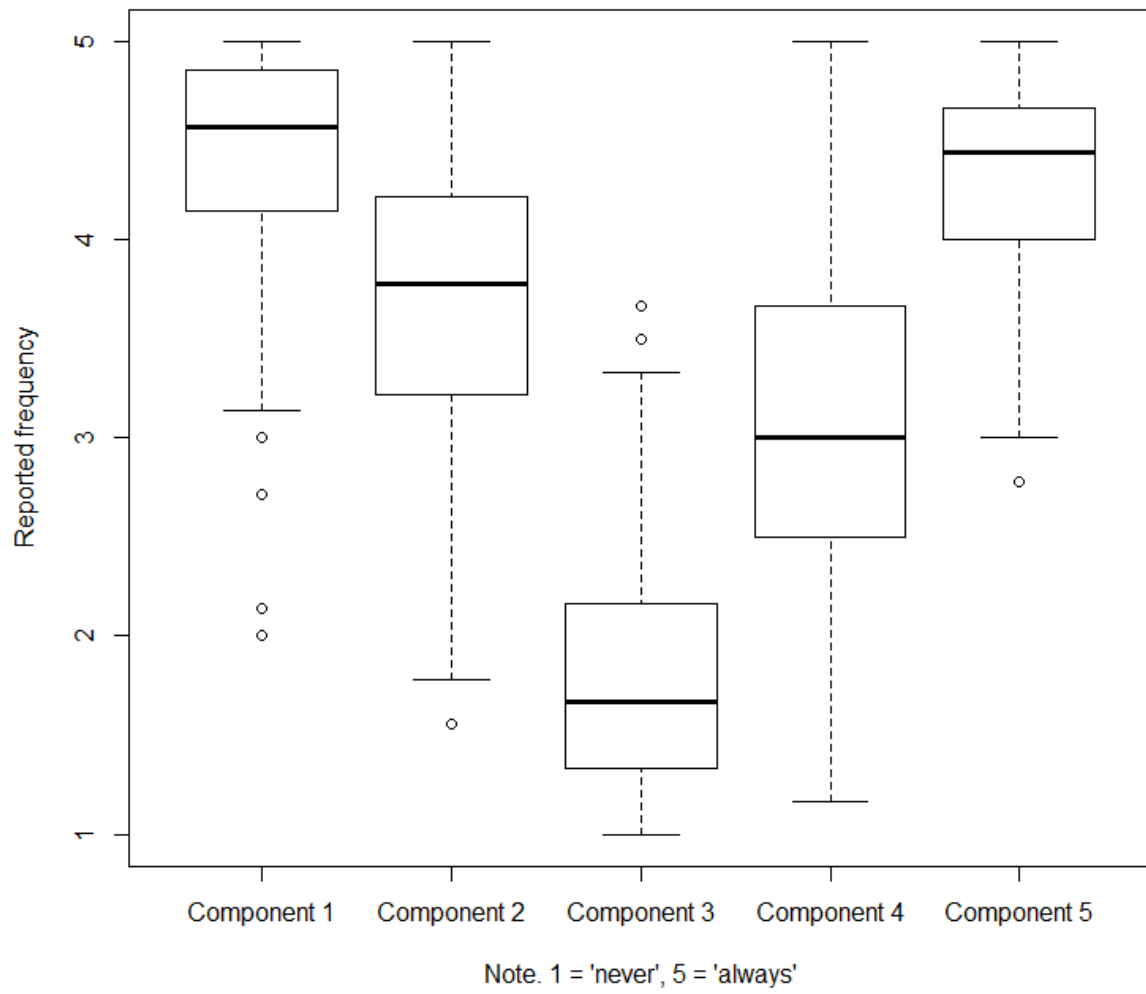
7.3 Study 3: "Coach and no regrets about it: On the life satisfaction, work-related mental strain, and use of supervision of workplace coaches"

Abstract

Previous research indicates that coaches frequently experience negative effects for themselves from their work and therefore live with potential stressors due to their work. This study examines whether or not workplace coaches are satisfied with their life. Data was gathered from 110 coaches (75% of which were self-employed) from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland via an online survey. Coaches were asked about different aspects of life satisfaction (concerning their job, financial situation, and leisure time) and work-related mental strain (i.e., cognitive and emotional strain). Compared to German population norm scores (including both employed and self-employed working individuals), coaches show higher satisfaction with their job and leisure time, and less work-related mental strain. Moreover, the vast majority of coaches would choose to be a workplace coach again in retrospect. Coaching supervision had a significant buffer effect on coaches' job satisfaction when they experienced a high amount of work-related mental strain. Findings imply that coaches are able to counterbalance the possible negative effects on life satisfaction of their work as coaches. The use of coaching supervision appears to be a successful measure to maintain high satisfaction with their work as coaches despite an elevated level of mental strain.

Keywords: Coaching; negative effects; life satisfaction; job satisfaction; mental strain; coaching supervision

Practice Points

To which field of practice area(s) in coaching is your contribution directly relevant?

Findings from our study are relevant to all coaching practitioners, in particular self-employed workplace coaches, who are interested in possible effects of their work on their life satisfaction and in ways of dealing with work-related mental strain.

What do you see as the primary contribution your submission makes to coaching practice?

Findings indicate that most workplace coaches are satisfied with their life in general and their job in particular. In light of previous findings on negative effects of coaching for coaches, these results seem to indicate that coaches cope well with stressors of their work.

Coaching supervision plays an important role: Supervision has a buffer effect on coaches' job satisfaction when work-related mental strain is high.

What are its tangible implications for practitioners?

Practitioners should consider using supervision in their practice particularly at times when they experience heightened levels of work-related mental strain.

Introduction

As the challenges of the working world and the demands they place on organisations and employees are rising, so are the demands on workplace coaches (Fritsch, 2011). Following Bozer and Jones (2018), we define workplace coaching as 'a one-to-one custom-tailored, learning and development intervention that uses a collaborative, reflective, goal-focused relationship to achieve professional outcomes that are valued by the coachee' (p. 1). In addition, coaches are also often expected to ensure a 'demonstrable return on investment' (Hawkins, 2008, p. 28) for the commissioning organisation. Against this background, coaches are likely to experience tensions associated with the competing agendas of different organisational stakeholders involved in the coaching process (i.e., triangulate relationships, Louis & Fatien, 2014). Given the rising demands of the working world, it is likely that coaches also experience negative feelings, for example, from difficult or unpleasant contents

of the coaching sessions (e.g., the clients' experiences of being bullied at work; Schermuly &

Bohnhardt, 2014). Besides negative feelings, negative effects for the coach include

experiences of unpleasant behaviour towards the coach (e.g., insults) or a lack of social

integration of the coach (Graßmann, Schermuly, & Wach, 2018; Schermuly & Graßmann,

2018). Negative effects can be defined as harmful and unwanted results that are directly

caused by the coaching practice (Schermuly, 2014). Empirical evidence indicates that coaches

experience on average seven negative effects for themselves per coaching engagement.

Negative effects in turn are positively related to the emotional exhaustion and perceived stress

of coaches (Graßmann et al., 2018; Schermuly, 2014), that is, emotional and cognitive strain

(i.e., work-related mental strain; Mohr, Müller, Rigotti, Aycan, & Tschan, 2006). We argue

that work-related mental strain in turn could influence coaches' job satisfaction. In line with

Fahrenberg and colleagues (2000), we regard job satisfaction as an essential part of the overall

life satisfaction of the working individual.

Investigating the life satisfaction of workplace coaches is relevant because substantial

empirical evidence has found a positive relationship between job satisfaction and job

performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). Furthermore, the general life

satisfaction of individuals in human service professions is positively related to the quality of

their work (e.g., Nissen-Lie, Havik, Hoglend, Monsen, & Ronnestad, 2013) and negatively

related to burnout (Cushway & Tyler, 1996; Visser, Smets, Oort, & de Haes, 2003). To date,

there is no comparable research concerning the life satisfaction or mental strain of workplace

coaches. A better understanding of the overall life and job satisfaction of coaches is, however,

an important step towards the professionalisation of coaching. Findings of a positive influence

of personal satisfaction of therapists on the working alliance between therapist and patient

(Nissen-Lie et al., 2013) are meaningful for workplace coaching, since a strong working

alliance predicts successful coaching outcomes (Graßmann, Schölmerich, & Schermuly,

2019). Hence, life satisfaction could indirectly contribute to coaching effectiveness.

Strategies that alleviate perceived mental strain and the potential decrease in life and job satisfaction of workplace coaches associated with it, are therefore particularly relevant. Scholars argue that coaches, due to their ethical responsibility towards clients, need to recognize the importance of engaging in reflective practice (e.g., Passmore, Brown, Csigas et al., 2017) to ensure their own 'self-care' (Clutterbuck, Whitaker, & Lucas, 2016, p. 105) in order to be able to take care of their clients. Coaching supervision is considered as a particularly important reflective practice (Passmore et al., 2017). According to Hawkins and Smith (2013), coaching supervision can be ascribed several functions related to coaches' self-care (i.e., management of coaches' resources) and professionalisation (i.e., ensuring quality of coaches' work and development of their skills). First empirical evidence suggests that coaching supervision mitigates negative effects from coaching practice on the coach (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2017).

Against this background, our study takes a closer look at the life satisfaction and work-related mental strain experienced by workplace coaches as well as the role that reflective practice, namely coaching supervision might play.

Theoretical Background

Strain, Life Satisfaction, and Job Satisfaction of Human Service Professionals

Job stressors play an important role in burnout of individuals who work as 'human service providers' (Lee & Ashforth, 1996, p. 124), such as counsellors and social workers (e.g., Cushway & Tyler, 1996; Fengler, 2001; Lee, Lim, Yang, & Lee, 2011). Empirically validated stressors include, among others, elevated general job pressure (Kirkcaldy, Thome, & Thomas, 1989) and a high level of responsibility for the well-being of others (Petrowski, Hessel, Eichenberg, & Brähler, 2014). Regarding the subjective experience of strain in helping professions, individuals working in the social sector indeed show above average ratings concerning cognitive and emotional strain (i.e., rumination and emotional irritation) in

comparison to norm scores of the general working population (Mohr, Müller, & Rigotti, 2005). For example, psychotherapists report higher levels of emotional strain in comparison to population norm scores (Reimer, Jurkat, Vetter, & Raskin, 2005) and often experience feelings of emotional exhaustion associated with thinking about clients outside of work (Rupert & Morgan, 2005).

The numerous job stressors and the subjective experience of strain and emotional exhaustion reported raise the question whether or not these professionals are satisfied with their life in general and with their job in particular. The overall life and more specifically job satisfaction of different helping professions has been investigated extensively, particularly with regard to clinical/counselling psychologists and psychotherapists (e.g., Hessel, Geyer, Brähler, & Eichenberg, 2009; Radeke & Mahoney, 2000; Reimer et al., 2005; Goodyear et al., 2008), but also regarding social workers and physicians (e.g., Kirkcaldy et al., 1989; Shanafelt et al., 2012). Clinical psychologists and psychotherapists are generally satisfied with their working situation and their life overall (Hessel et al., 2009; Radeke & Mahoney, 2000; Reimer et al., 2005). Besides, the majority of psychotherapists in private practice and counselling psychologists are pleased with the career they have chosen and would choose it again in retrospect (Goodyear et al., 2008; Reimer et al., 2005). A similar picture emerges if one considers findings from professions related to workplace coaching outside the field of helping professions. Business consultants, too, are generally satisfied with their job, even though they are dissatisfied with associated working hours (Kriegesmann & Striewe, 2010).

The question arises of how strain and life satisfaction are related to each other. On the one hand, the empirical evidence reported so far suggests that life and job satisfaction can be high despite significant work-related strain. For example, psychotherapists in private practice report high levels of satisfaction with their life in general and their job in particular, regardless of their high level of emotional strain (Reimer et al., 2005). On the other hand, meta-analytic findings (Lee & Ashforth, 1996) show a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion

and job satisfaction for human service providers. One possible explanation for these contradictory findings lies in the type of employment (i.e., self-employed workers vs. employed professionals).

Life and Job Satisfaction in Self-Employed vs. Employed Professionals

As a self-employed worker, one holds more control over one's work activities which in turn leads to experiences of higher personal accomplishments, even when it also implies higher levels of over-involvement with clients in professions involved in client work (Rupert & Morgan, 2005). Considering the differences between self-employed and employed professionals is relevant to coaching as the vast majority of workplace coaches is self-employed (e.g., Stephan & Rötz, 2017).

Research findings on life and job satisfaction and perceived strain suggest possible downsides for self-employed professionals. They suffer from 'time poverty' (Merz & Rathjen, 2011, p. 51) and psychotherapists working in private practice experience more economic uncertainty and isolation (i.e., physical and mental isolation) than employed clinical psychologists (Cushway & Tyler, 1996). On the positive side, self-employed workers are more fulfilled with their job (e.g., Benz & Frey, 2008) and their lives in general (e.g., Hessels, Arampatzi, van der Zwan, & Burger, 2017) than paid employees.

Negative Effects of Coaching for the Coach and Their Possible Influence on Their Life and Job Satisfaction

Examining negative effects of coaching has emerged rather recently, both regarding negative effects for clients and for coaches. Negative effects of coaching for the coach him- or herself can take various forms, for example, experiences of clients' unpleasant behaviour towards the coach or a lack of social integration of the coach (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2018). Coaches might also experience negative feelings (e.g., self-doubt) due to the management of multiple

agendas during coaching engagements (Louis & Fatien, 2014) or related to difficult or unpleasant contents of the coaching sessions themselves (Schermuly & Bohnhardt, 2014). Research findings suggest that most coaches experience on average seven negative effects for themselves per coaching engagement (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2018). When coaches report more negative effects for themselves, they also experience more stress, emotional exhaustion, and impaired health and well-being (Graßmann et al., 2018).

Taken together, the nature of the work as a workplace coach as well as the fact that coaches are mostly self-employed are likely to affect both the mental strain coaches experience and their life and job satisfaction. On the one hand, research on negative effects of coaching for the coach suggests a possibly high level of mental strain (e.g., Schermuly & Graßmann, 2018) and possibly lower life and job satisfaction than other working individuals. On the other hand, negative effects of coaching for the coach generally have a low intensity (Graßmann et al., 2018) and coaching is oftentimes only one part of the professional activities of the average workplace coach (e.g., Stephan & Rötz, 2017). Therefore, the impact of these negative effects upon the work and life satisfaction of workplace coaches may be limited. Moreover, professionals in related fields such as psychotherapists report rather high life and job satisfaction albeit substantial emotional exhaustion and perceived strain (Reimer et al., 2005). Further, previous research also suggests potential positive effects of coaching not only for clients but also for coaches themselves (e.g., coaches' personal development; Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018).

Being self-employed in comparison to being a paid employee has both positive and negative effects on general life and job satisfaction (e.g., Benz & Frey, 2008; Merz & Rathjen, 2011).

Thus, regarding the level of strain experienced by workplace coaches, the interpersonal and emotional aspects of their work might lead to above average mental strain, as it is the case for professionals working in the social sector (Mohr, Müller, & Rigotti, 2005). Then again,

self-employed professionals perceive more control over their work activities and experience

higher personal accomplishments (e.g., Rupert & Morgan, 2005). Hence, it is unclear in

which direction coaches differ from other working individuals regarding mental strain. That is

why we assume:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Coaches' cognitive and emotional strain differs from those of a
>
> representative sample of the general working population.

Findings regarding life and job satisfaction of related professions are ambiguous as well and

not consistently related to the level of mental strain (e.g., Hessel et al., 2009; Reimer et al.,

2005). We therefore postulate:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Coaches' life satisfaction differs from those of a representative sample of
>
> the general population.

A particular perspective on job satisfaction is to ask whether one would choose one's job

again in retrospect. Given the high levels of agreement among psychotherapists in private

practice (65%, Reimer et al., 2005) and counselling psychologists (50%, Goodyear et al.,

2008), we expect that most workplace coaches (i.e., at least 50%) would choose their job as

coach again as well.

Hypothesis 3: The majority of coaches would choose their job as coach again in retrospect.

Effect of Supervision on Job Satisfaction

Because high confidentiality is generally required in coaching, coaches often find themselves

on their own in facing difficulties (Graßmann et al., 2018). Reflective practice, such as

coaching supervision has been ascribed an important role in coaches' self-care and continuous

professional development (e.g., Passmore et al., 2017). It supports coaches and enables them

to navigate the tensions they are confronted with, both within the coach-client dyad and in

navigating the relationships with other stakeholders involved in the coaching engagement

(Hawkins & Smith, 2013).

Coaching supervision is defined as 'a formal process of professional support, which ensures continuing development of the coach and effectiveness of his/her coaching practice' (Bachkirova, 2008, pp. 16-17). It provides support and relief for coaches and fosters their professionalisation due to its *resourcing* (i.e., helping the coach to manage his/her own reactions and to restore his/her own resources), *developmental* (i.e., developing skills and understanding of the coach), and *qualitative* (i.e., ensuring the quality of the coach's work) functions (Hawkins & Smith, 2013; Kotte, 2017). In fact, according to findings by Lawrence and Whyte (2014), the vast majority of coaches named supervision as their primary strategy when feeling the need for support. First experimental findings corroborate that coaches benefit from supervision to counterbalance negative effects of their coaching practice (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2017).

Meta-analytic findings indicate a negative relationship between mental strain (i.e., emotional exhaustion) and job satisfaction (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Taken together, coaching supervision might therefore act as a buffer to the negative effect of mental strain on job satisfaction. This is why we assume:

Hypothesis 4: Coaching supervision has a moderating effect on the relationship between mental strain (i.e., cognitive and emotional strain) and coaches' job satisfaction.

Methods

Workplace coaches from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland were recruited via newsletters of national and international coaching associations and were invited to participate in an online-survey. One hundred and ten coaches completed the questionnaire.

Participants

Participants were on average 51.4 years old ($SD = 8.21$) with age ranging from 28 to 69 years. Of all coaches that participated, 56 (59%) were female. On average, they have worked as

coaches for 13.7 years (SD = 8.36). Our sample is representative of the German coaching market concerning age, gender, and experience as a coach (Middendorf, 2018; Stephan & Rötz, 2017). Coaches indicated to work 41.6 hours per week overall (SD = 14.6). Even though male participants stated to work more hours per week than their female colleagues (M_{male}= 47.2 vs. M_{female} = 38.6), both can be considered to work full-time. 40.7% of that time was dedicated to work as a coach (SD = 25.2). Working hours as a coach did not differ significantly between male and female coaches of our sample. When asked about their setting of coaching work, 82 (75%) of the surveyed coaches worked as self-employed coach, 10 (9%) stated to be in-house coaches, and 18 (16%) indicated to be both self-employed and in-house coach. Almost half of the sample (43%, n = 47) had a degree in psychology, 25 (23%) had majored in education, and 19 (17%) in business or economics. Sixty-eight coaches (62%) have used supervision before, whereas 42 (38%) answered not to use supervision.

Measures

Work-Related Mental Strain

To measure work-related mental strain, we used items from the *Irritation Scale* (Mohr, Müller, & Rigotti, 2005), which comprises cognitive and emotional strain and proved to be a reliable and valid instrument in various studies (Mohr, Rigotti, & Müller, 2005). Standardisation data came from a representative sample of both employed and self-employed working individuals (N = 4,030) from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (Mohr, Müller, & Rigotti, 2005).

The three items of the subscale *cognitive strain* refer to the process of rumination, that is, worrying about work after working time and not being able to 'switch off' from work, whereas *emotional strain* (four items) describes a person's irritability and nervousness caused by work (Mohr et al., 2006). Items were adapted to coaching for the study by substituting 'work' with 'coaching (work)'. Items concerning cognitive strain were, for example, 'Even at

home, I often think of problems of my coaching work.', and for emotional strain, 'After a coaching session, I sometimes get grumpy when others approach me.'. The items were rated on a 7-point-Likert-scale ranging from '*I do not agree*' to '*I totally agree*'. Cronbach's α coefficients were .83 for cognitive strain and .82 for emotional strain.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction of the coaches was measured by using 13 items from the subscales *job satisfaction* (five items), satisfaction with *financial situation* (four items), and *leisure activity* (four items) of the *Life Satisfaction Questionnaire* (Fahrenberg, Myrtek, Schumacher, & Brähler, 2000). Items were rated on a 7-point-Likert-scale ranging from 1 ('*very dissatisfied*') to 7 ('*very satisfied*'). Items were for example 'With the variety that the profession as coach provides me, I am…' (job satisfaction), 'With the income of my coaching profession, I am…' (satisfaction with financial situation), and 'With the amount of available time that I have for my hobbies, I am…' (satisfaction with leisure time). Cronbach's α coefficients were .88 for job satisfaction and financial situation, and α = .85 for satisfaction with leisure time. If necessary, the wording of the items was adapted to coaching, that is, general statements such as 'With my work I am…' were put as 'With my work *as a coach* I am…' because the majority of workplace coaches does not work full-time in coaching and we were only interested in their satisfaction with their work as coaches. Furthermore, we excluded items that were not suitable for the work as a coach (e.g., 'With the atmosphere at my work place, I am…'). Standardisation data from the German general population ($N = 3,047$) is included in the test manual (Fahrenberg et al., 2000).

In line with Reimer and colleagues' (2005) operationalisation of job satisfaction, we further asked the participants if they would choose their job as coach again ('*no*', '*rather no*', '*rather yes*', or '*yes*') from today's point of view.

Results

 For all calculations, we used the open-source statistical environment R (R Core Team, 2016).

Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of variables appear in Table 1.

[Table 1 near here]

The ratings of our survey were compared to available population norm scores of

representative samples from Germany (Fahrenberg et al., 2000), or Germany, Austria, and

Switzerland (Mohr, Müller, & Rigotti, 2005). Further, if possible, results were compared to

findings of the job satisfaction of psychotherapists (Reimer et al., 2005).

Concerning their level of cognitive strain, coaches show significantly lower ratings than

the German working population ($N = 4030$; Mohr, Müller, & Rigotti, 2005), $t(902) = -6.22$,

$p < .001$, $d = 0.63$. Regarding their emotional strain, coaches also show significantly lower

ratings than the reported norm scores, $t(902) = -8.72$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.89$. Thus, hypothesis 1

was confirmed.

Further, results indicate that the surveyed coaches are more satisfied with their job in

comparison to the general working population ($N = 3047$; Fahrenberg et al., 2000),

$t(1877) = 4.25$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.42$. They are more satisfied with their leisure time, $t(2978) =$

1.96, $p = .049$, $d = 0.19$. Concerning the financial situation, results of the comparison are not

as clear. Coaches' ratings do not differ significantly from the German population norm scores

regarding their financial situation in general, $t(2978) = -1.62$, $p = .11$, $d = 0.16$. Nevertheless,

ratings of the subcategories of the dimension financial situation varied. Coaches were more

satisfied with their income as coach than the representative population, $t(2978) = 2.28$,

$p < .05$, $d = 0.22$. On the other hand, participants were less satisfied with the financial

security of their work as coach, $t(2978) = -3.99$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.38$, and also with provision

for retirement, $t(2978) = -5.84$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.57$. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was partly

confirmed.

When asked if they would choose their job again from today's perspective, 81 coaches answered with '*yes*' (73.6%), 26 (23.6%) with '*rather yes*', while only three surveyed coaches (2.7%) would rather not choose their job again, and none answered '*no*'. Therefore, distinctly more than half of the surveyed coaches would choose to become a workplace coach again, $\chi^2(1) = 98.3$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, coaches were more likely than psychotherapists to choose their job again (see Reimer et al., 2005), $\chi^2(1) = 187.5$, $p < .001$. Hence, hypothesis 3 was confirmed.

To test the influence of supervision on the relationship between job satisfaction and mental strain (i.e., emotional and cognitive strain), we predicted coaches' job satisfaction by the interaction of mental strain and supervision in a multiple regression, $R^2 = .19$, $F(3, 105) = 8.05$, $p < .001$. Variables were standardised.

[Table 2 near here]

Table 2 and Figure 1 display the findings. For average levels of mental strain, job satisfaction is on an average level as well, whether with use of supervision or without. With increasing mental strain, however, coaches with supervision show significantly more job satisfaction than those without supervision.

[Figure 1 near here]

That is, if work-related mental strain is high, job satisfaction is higher when coaches use supervision. When mental strain is above average, coaches who use supervision still experience an average level of job satisfaction, whereas coaches without supervision show substantial declines in job satisfaction. Therefore, hypothesis 4 was confirmed.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that workplace coaches show significantly less mental strain than the general working population and are generally more satisfied with their life, in particular with their job as coach. Furthermore, coaching supervision had a moderating effect on the influence of mental strain on job satisfaction.

Given the relatively high prevalence of negative effects of coaching for coaches themselves, that is, on average seven negative effects per coaching engagement and their impact on well-being of the coach (Graßmann et al., 2018), one could have assumed to find lower ratings of satisfaction. One explanation for these findings might be that even though negative effects are found in most coaching engagements, they have a rather low intensity (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2018) and therefore probably have merely a weak impact on coaches' strain and satisfaction with their life. Furthermore, it can be argued that coaches have a repertoire of support resources to counterbalance possible negative effects of their work. Professional coping strategies might mitigate work-related strain. Individuals who professionally support others may be particularly well equipped with and resort to strategies of prevention for themselves to cope with stressors of their work, as suggested by first findings from the field of psychotherapy (Lee et al., 2011).

As the majority of our sample (i.e., 75%) is self-employed, the results may also be interpreted as reflecting the general advantages and stressors of self-employment. We were able to show that coaches were more satisfied with their job and leisure time compared to the average German working population (including both employed and self-employed individuals). This is in line with previous findings of psychotherapists in private practice who report to have higher control over their activities (e.g., flexibility to adjust hours and client types) and experience less emotional exhaustion than employed colleagues (Rupert & Morgan, 2005). As perceived control and autonomy at work is positively associated with job satisfaction (Spector, 1986), this could explain the high ratings of job satisfaction found in our sample. Concerning the financial situation of workplace coaches, however, the results reflect

stressors that self-employed workers have to face in contrast to employees, that is, dissatisfaction with their financial security and provision for retirement (e.g., Hessel et al., 2009).

The findings that the vast majority (97%) of our sample would choose their job as coach again and the high level of job satisfaction are promising concerning the effectiveness of coaching. Psychotherapy research reveals the positive impact of personal satisfaction of therapists on the working alliance between therapist and patient (e.g., Nissen-Lie et al., 2013). First meta-analytic results on coaching indicate a positive relationship of a high-quality working alliance of coach and client with the client's coaching outcomes and a negative relationship with negative effects of coaching for both the client and coach (Graßmann et al., 2019). Thus, we argue that satisfied coaches may be better able to develop a high-quality working alliance between themselves and their clients and, on this basis, work successfully on the client's goals. Put differently, a coach that endures fewer negative effects and mental strain from coaching and enjoys his or her job more is most probably a better coach than a dissatisfied coach. In agreement with other scholars (e.g., Clutterbuck et al., 2016; Passmore et al., 2017), we argue accordingly that self-care and reflective practice of the coach can be considered as an ethical obligation for workplace coaches in order to deliver the best possible coaching to their clients.

While on average the coaches from our sample reported less strain than the general working population, nevertheless, the range also included coaches who did show above average levels of mental strain. We found that coaching supervision had a moderating (buffer) effect on the influence of mental strain on job satisfaction: If work-related mental strain is high, job satisfaction is higher when coaches use supervision. These findings imply that supervision plays an important role in coaches' self-care. Thus, coaches should not hesitate to seek supervision in their coaching practice as the risk of negative effects for coaches exists, and supervision seems to be a successful strategy to better deal with the associated mental

strain. This study therefore provides further insight on when the use of coaching supervision is particularly important. While previous findings show that supervision is decidedly helpful for coaching novices (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2017), our results suggest that supervision is advisable when mental strain of the work as a coach is high regardless of the level of working experience as coach. Hence, our findings emphasize the importance of the resourcing function of coaching supervision postulated in previous research (e.g., Hawkins & Smith, 2013) and lend support to the importance of coach reflective practice and self-care (e.g., Passmore et al., 2017).

One limitation of our study is that it utilised a cross-sectional and correlative study design. We therefore cannot infer any causal conclusions regarding the relationship between job satisfaction, mental strain, and use of supervision. While we assume that high mental strain results in lower job satisfaction, it could also be that coaches who are more satisfied with their job experience less work-related mental strain. A longitudinal study could clarify the relationship between job satisfaction, mental strain, and the use of coaching supervision and help to identify the underlying processes. A diary study, which has the particular advantage of reducing retrospective bias (e.g., Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, & Zapf, 2010), could identify antecedents of coaches' emotional and cognitive strain and its consequences on job satisfaction and vice versa, both with and without accompanying supervision.

Beyond the specific focus of our study, further research is needed regarding the use (e.g., frequency, occasions, functions) and long-term effects of coaching supervision in order to establish it as an evidence-based strategy of reflective practice that contributes to the professionalisation of coaching. Future research could build on and extend existing findings from the more advanced research on clinical or psychotherapy supervision (e.g., Möller & Kotte, 2015; Wheeler & Richards, 2007).

Furthermore, our results might be distorted due to socially desirable responding which may account for the high levels of satisfaction reported. Coaches might have been biased by

their (unconscious) belief that an individual who supports others professionally must also be satisfied with his or her own life and should not suffer from mental strain him- or herself.

Moreover, although our sample is representative of the German coaching market in terms of age, gender, and years of work experience as coach (Middendorf, 2018; Stephan & Rötz, 2017), it is not representative in terms of professional background of coaches: Many respondents of our survey were psychologists (43% in our study vs. 23% of German coaches), whereas coaches who studied business/economics were underrepresented (17% vs. 27%). It may be that psychologists, due to their training, are better prepared to deal with negative effects such as negative feelings resulting from the interaction with the client or other stakeholders of the coaching process. In contrast, coaches with a business background may have fewer concepts for understanding negative feelings (e.g., the concept of counter-transference; Nissen-Lie et al., 2013) and less coping strategies for dealing with negative effects. This might also have biased our results in a positive way. However, while mental strain is descriptively higher in coaches with a business (vs. psychology) background, these results do not reach significance in our sample.

Our sample comprises marginally more women (59%) and even though the surveyed individuals work full-time on average ($M = 42$ hours per week), they practice coaching only as part of their working time ($M = 41\%$). That is, our sample is comparable to the European coaching community where a recent large-scale sample comprised 61% females and found that coaches practiced coaching during 10 to 30% of their total working time (Passmore et al., 2017). With regard to the possibly gendered nature of coaching, we found that male and female workplace coaches showed similar working patterns. Although males worked slightly more overall ($M = 47.2$ hours per week), females also worked full-time ($M = 38.2$ hours per week) rather than part-time only. The weekly hours working as a coach did not differ between male and female study participants. What remains unanswered are the reasons why coaching is practiced as only one part of professional activities more often than not. To what extent is

this due to the task of coaching itself and the demands it places on practitioners, for example, a potential risk of higher mental strain when coaching full-time? Or is it rather the case that coaching practice alone might not generate enough income or financial security? In our study, we specifically focused on mental strain and job satisfaction as they relate to the *work as coach*, not taking into consideration the other professional activities that coaches pursue in the remainder of their working time. Future studies could contextualize our findings by taking into consideration the full range of professional activities coaches pursue and their relative impact on mental strain, job and life satisfaction.

In summary, our findings indicate that workplace coaches are rather satisfied with their job and show relatively low work-related mental strain. Since coaching supervision buffers the negative impact of mental strain on job satisfaction, our findings also suggest that coaches can benefit substantially from coaching supervision, particularly when they experience heightened levels of mental strain. Future research should clarify the relationship between mental strain, job satisfaction, and the use of coaching supervision longitudinally in order to identify underlying processes. Future research could also investigate our findings further by considering coping strategies beyond supervision and professional activities workplace coaches are engaged in besides coaching.

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Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Emotional strain	1.44	0.74					
(2) Cognitive strain	2.53	1.30	.50**				
(3) Satisfaction: Job	5.68	1.04	–.34**	–.29**			
(4) Satisfaction: Leisure time	5.43	1.98	–.27**	–.27**	.41**		
(5) Satisfaction: Finances	4.46	1.27	–.02	–.14	.52**	.49**	
(6) Use of supervision	0.62	0.49	.05	–.14	.16	.06	.20*

Note. $N = 110$. Supervision was coded as 1 = supervision, 0 = no supervision.

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 2

Multiple regression of coaches' job satisfaction predicted by the interaction of mental strain and use of supervision

Variable	β	SE_β	t	p
Intercept	–0.17	0.14	–1.16	.25
Mental strain	–0.61	0.14	–4.23	< .001
Supervision	0.27	0.18	1.53	.13
Mental strain * Supervision	0.42	0.18	2.32	.02

Note. $N = 110$. Coefficients are standardised. Supervision was coded as 1 = supervision, 0 = no supervision.

Figure 1

Interaction effect of mental strain and use of supervision predicting coaches' job satisfaction
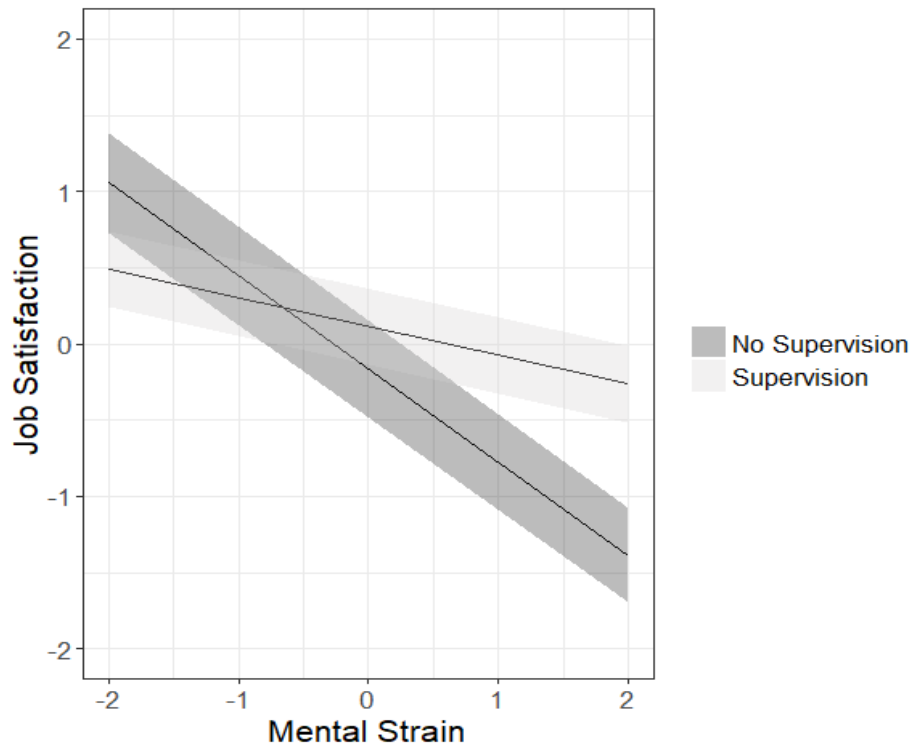
8   Statement of Independence

I herewith give assurance that I completed this dissertation independently without prohibited assistance of third parties or aids other than those identified in this dissertation. All passages that are drawn from published or unpublished writings, either word-for-word or in paraphrase, have been clearly identified as such. Third parties were not involved in the drafting of the content of this dissertation; most specifically I did not employ the assistance of a dissertation advisor. No part of this thesis has been used in another doctoral or tenure process.

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Alessa Antonia Müller

9 Publication Status and Scope of Responsibility

Study	Journal Publication	Scope of responsibility	Conference Contribution
1	Müller, A. A. & Kotte, S. (2020). Of SMART, GROW and goals gone wild: A systematic literature review on the relevance of goal activities in workplace coaching. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 15*(2), 69–98.	Jointly responsible for conceptual development and data analysis. Primarily responsible for literature search and manuscript development.	Müller, A. A. & Kotte, S. (2020). The relevance of goal activities in workplace coaching: A systematic literature review. In G. Atinc (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 80th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management*. Online ISSN: 2151-6561.
2	Submitted for publication (August 2020): Müller, A. A., Kotte, S., Diermann, I., & Möller, H. (2020). *Constructing a Full Picture of the Coaching Client: Coaching Practices During the Initial Exploration in Workplace Coaching and How They Relate to Coach Characteristics*.	Jointly responsible for conceptual development, and study design and material. Primarily responsible for literature search and manuscript development. Solely responsible for data collection and data analysis.	./.
	Submission for publication of preceding interview study (July 2020): Diermann, I., Kotte, S., Müller, A. A., & Möller, H. (2020). *Initial exploration in workplace coaching – Coaches' thematic and methodological approach.*	Jointly responsible for data analysis and manuscript development.	*Conference contributions to preceding interview study:* Diermann, I., Müller, A. A., Möller, H., & Kotte, S. (2018, September). *"What should we work on today?" – An interview study on coaches'*

(continued)

			thematic and methodical approach to the initial exploration in workplace coaching [Conference presentation]. 11th Annual Coaching in Leadership and Healthcare Conference of the Institute of Coaching, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.
			Kotte, S., Müller, A. A., Diermann, I., & Möller, H. (2018, September). *„Womit sind Sie heute hier?": Eine Interviewstudie zum inhaltlichen und methodischen Vorgehen von Coaches bei der Eingangsdiagnostik* [Conference presentation]. 51st Conference of the German Association of Psychology, Frankfurt/Main.
3	Müller, A. A., Kotte, S., & Möller, H. (2020). Coach and no regrets about it: On the life satisfaction, work-related mental strain, and use of supervision of workplace coaches. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice, 13*(1), 16–29.	Jointly responsible for conceptual development, study design and material, and data collection. Primarily responsible for literature search and manuscript development. Solely responsible for data analysis.	Müller, A. A., Diermann, I., & Möller, H. (2018, June). *Wie zufrieden sind Coaches mit ihrem Leben und Job? – Eine Befragung mit deutschsprachigen Coaches* [Conference presentation]. 5th Conference on Coaching, Olten, Switzerland.

Appendix: Table A1

Table A1

Overview of Previously Conducted Studies on Coaches' Coaching Practice

Author	Year	Study design	Perspective & Sample size	Nationality of study participants	Examined coaching practice	Stage when behavior occurred	Examined influencing coach variable
Bachkirova et al.	2015	Q-sort methodology	Coach ($N = 41$)	International sample (e.g., UK, US-American, Australian)	Coaching practice (e.g., using psychometric instruments, using metaphors, giving advice, exploration of coachee's values)	Mid-engagement coaching session	Nationality, primarily practiced coaching school/ tradition
Barner	2005	NA	NA	NA	Coaching assessment interview	Initial assessment	NA
Bastian	2015	Survey	Coach ($N = 215$)	US-American	Coaching practice (e.g., using certain assessment tools, using performance appraisal)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	Academic training (i.e., psychology vs. business degree; bachelor's vs. master's/doctoral degree)
Bechtel	2018	Survey	Coachee ($N = 171$)	US-American	Coaching practice (e.g., conducting interviews, goal setting)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	NA

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Author	Year	Study design	Perspective & Sample size	Nationality of study participants	Examined coaching practice	Stage when behavior occurred	Examined influencing coach variable
Bono et al.	2009	Survey	Coach (*N* = 428)	US-American	Coaching practice (e.g., conducting interviews, using multisource ratings, using personality tests, goal setting, role-playing)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	Psychologist vs. non-psychologist coaches
David et al.	2014	Survey	Coach (*N* = 194)	International sample (European & US-American)	Goal setting	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	Gender, nationality, coaching experience, coach training
Del Giudice et al.	2014	Survey	Coach (*N* = 112)	US-American	Personality assessment practice (i.e., using personality tests)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	NA
Jenson	2016	Survey	Coachee (*N* = 351)	US-American	Coaching practice (e.g., using multisource ratings, using work analysis, using performance data/evaluations)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	NA
Diermann et al.	under review	Interview study (exploratory)	Coach (*N* = 20)	German	Coaching practice (i.e., methods used and content addressed)	Initial exploration	NA

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Author	Year	Study design	Perspective & Sample size	Nationality of study participants	Examined coaching practice	Stage when behavior occurred	Examined influencing coach variable
Liljenstrand & Nebeker	2008	Survey	Coach ($N = 2,231$)	US-American	Coaching practice (e.g., using cognitive ability tests, using personality tests, using 360-degree-feedback)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	Educational background in psychology (I/O or clinical), business, or education
Marshall	2006	Interview study (critical incident)	Coach ($N = 19$)	US-American	Coaching practice (e.g., goal setting, using personality inventories, using 360-degree-feedback)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	NA
McDowall & Smewing	2009	Survey	Coach ($N = 90$)	UK	Assessment practice (i.e., using psychometric tests)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	NA
Newsom & Dent	2011	Survey	Coach ($N = 130$)	International sample	Coaching practice (e.g., conducting interviews, goal setting)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	Gender, coaching experience, educational background
Vandaveer et al.	2016	Survey	Coach ($N = 282$)	US-American	Coaching practice (e.g., conducting interviews, using personality tests, job shadowing, role-playing)	Not specified (i.e., whole coaching process)	NA
Wastian & Poetschki	2016	Interview study (exploratory)	Coach ($n = 43$) Coachee ($n = 19$)	German	Goal setting and goal adaption	Whole coaching process	NA