Coaching in Visegrad Four Countries: A Comparison to other European countries*

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Abstract

The Visegrad Four countries (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary) share common traits in economics (Capik/Drahokoupil 2011), common history (Fawn 2013) and some political and social challenges (Förster/György Tòth 1997). In this article, we seek to determine common trends in the relatively narrow field of (executive) coaching. In the introduction, we explain the psychological background rooted in different learning theories (e.g., Kolb model, ELT) and psychotherapeutic approaches related to coaching such as humanistic psychology or solution-focused approach. The study itself formed part of a European-wide research project, where almost 3000 respondents from 51 European countries answered a questionnaire regarding professional coaching and mentoring. Answers from 419 Visegrad coaches and 1745 coaches from other European countries were compared to determine the trends and traits of the Visegrad Group-based coaching. Key insights from the study included significant differences in the use of methods of reflection such as reading coaching research, attending peer networks, using a mentor or attending webinars. There were also significant differences in the areas in which coaches pursue. Visegrad Four coaches coach significantly more in the area of life and well-being coaching and education coaching and less in the area of performance coaching. We also explored the coaching approaches and found that cognitive-behavioral coaching, NLP, transactional analysis and gestalt coaching are significantly more popular in the European sample while a solution-focused approach is used more in the Visegrad Four countries sample.

Keywords: Coaching, Visegrad Group, leader development, supervision
JEL Codes: M1 (M12), M5 (M53)

Introduction

Coaching represents a developmental method focused on facilitating clients through self-reflection to identify their needs or goals, review alternative plans and develop new insights or action plans which contribute to the individual's and his or her organization's performance. Coaching frequently takes part in the form of face-to-face meetings of two people (a trained coach and a coachee),

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and it has a salient interpersonal component requiring mutually and gradually built trust (Yi-Lin/McDowall 2014).

Areas of coaching cover vast and different agendas, ranging from career development, leadership, performance and role transition to education, and well-being coaching. Coaching has also spread to diverse areas outside of the world of work including improving driving skills (Passmore/Velez 2012), prison and offender management (McGregor 2015) and safety environments (Krauesslar/Avery/Passmore 2015)

Executive coaching, as one of the forms of individual coaching, has been defined as *´a practical, goal-oriented form of personal, one-on-one learning for busy executives that may be used to improve performance or executive behavior, enhance a career or prevent derailment, and work through organizational issues or change initiatives´* (Hall et al. 1999). It is based on the professional relationship of a ´client´ (or ´coachee´) and a coach who uses a set of techniques and methods to help the coachee reach the mutually identified goals, aiming to enhance the client's leadership or management performance and development.

Through executive coaching, individuals can engage in the issues connected to executive role performance or team and organizational functioning, which are topics sometimes hidden in the day-to-day routine (London 2002). It helps executives build self-awareness, self-reflect on their behavior, thoughts and emotions, understand other people as well as understand relationships and conflicts and find the balance between personal and work life (Theeboom/Beersma/van Vianen 2014; Athanasopoulou/Dopson 2018). It is based on the condition that the clients are self-motivated and do not require a clinical intervention (Jarvis/Lane/Fillery-Travis 2006).

It is often difficult for executives to obtain feedback about their behavior from the people in their organizations, as the subordinates might face challenges to express the feedback towards their managers (Lukaszewski 1988). According to some authors (Kampa/White 2002; Whinterspoon/White 1996), it is important to provide or mediate the feedback relevant to the coachee´s behavior and its impact on other people (within or outside the organization).

The research results confirmed this positive view of coaching, in the eyes of executives and their belief about its usefulness as a method for personal development (Hall et al. 1999; McGovern et al. 2001; Kampa-Kokesh 2001; Kampa/White, 2002). These studies also coincide with the turning point of executive coaching as a widely used organizational practice.

However, it was more than a further decade before more robust evidence of the efficacy of coaching demonstrated its potential as an organizational tool. In a systematic review of coaching outcome empirical studies, published in peer-review scholarly journals, Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2018) argued that the evi-

dence was now conclusive, indicating the value of coaching as a positive tool for change. Specifically, the authors showed the positive outcomes in the categories of ´personal development´ and ´the coachee and the others: behavioral changes´ (2018:75).

Even though executives perceive coaching as a beneficial developmental method, and empirical studies show promising results, we cannot always assume a universal value, as individual cases will vary. The quality of coaching services also varies significantly. In the majority of countries, there are no barriers to enter the coaching profession by law and therefore anyone can call themselves a coach or describe their approach as 'coaching' (the exceptions in Europe being Italy and Romania, where legislation has been introduced to control aspects of coaching (Passmore/Brown/Giuffredi/Lombardo 2018)). This open access creates potential risks, as not all coaches are trained, operate to the standards or are bound by ethical codes of conduct. The result is that many coaches can end up working with psychological topics or clients for which they lack the training (Fillery-Travis/Lane 2008:58).

The reference to psychological theories is evident in individual coaching approaches such as cognitive-behavioral coaching, solution-focused coaching, gestalt coaching, person-centered coaching, psychodynamic and others. In fact, a review of coaching models used by practitioners shows that many of the most popular models are drawn from psychological theory and therapeutic practice (Passmore/Brown/Csigas 2017).

The potential risks highlighted led to the birth of professional coaching federations across Europe. These bodies have reacted by promoting higher standards in training, establishing ethical codes of practice and providing mechanisms for clients to complain about coaching practice. For example, in the UK the ´Special Group in Coaching Psychology´ (SGCP) was established as a part of the British Psychological Society in 2004 to provide opportunities for sharing psychological research and practice knowledge relevant to coaching psychology. In the Czech Republic, (one of the Visegrad Four countries) an independent and non-profit organization, ČAKO (Czech Association of Coaches), was established in 2004 with the aim of assuring the quality and professionalism of the coaching services, supporting professional coaching training, setting the ethical standards and promoting coaching as a developmental approach (ČAKO merged with EMCC Czech Republic in 2018).

Despite the growth in membership of these professional bodies, national diversity alongside a lack of regulation or legislation has meant maintaining standards remains a demanding challenge. International professional associations play a major role in this, particularly the European Coaching and Mentoring Council, established in 1992 (initially established as the European Mentoring Council, it subsequently became the European Mentoring and Coaching Council in 2001)

and the International Coach Federation (ICF), established in 1995. Both these organizations attempt to specify the standards that coaches should fulfill and establish the system of accreditations ensuring a higher quality of the coaching services in all countries the national branches operate (Visegrad Four countries included).

Professional associations support the higher standard by providing individual coaches with opportunities for continuous professional development in the form of various workshops, conferences, and professional gatherings. They promote the importance of continuous reflection of the coaching practice, which also includes the use of supervision when a more experienced and qualified colleague offers support in dealing with challenges a coach faces and provides the opportunity for a reflective space.

Despite such efforts, some challenges endure – for example, the ICF identified 'untrained coaches' and 'confusion in the marketplace about coaching benefits' (ICF, 2012) as the two biggest obstacles to the development of the profession. Nevertheless, these systems of accreditation provide basic guidelines for an organization when choosing executive coaches.

Some differences between national trends in reflection have been identified in the previous research. For example, Czech coaches tend to attend conferences, peer-groups, and webinars significantly less than their European peers (Honsova/Passmore/Brown 2018; Passmore/Brown/Jarošová/Honsova/Langrová 2018). Based on this, we want to find out the differences between the whole Visegrad Group and the rest of Europe in the coaching population.

The aim to contribute as much as possible to the increasing level of coaching services poses various challenges for professional coaching associations. The question is whether these bodies are always aware of all of them. One of these challenges is to build development activities that form the accreditation process on proven models and principles of learning and instruction.

Theoretical background

Analyzing the process of continuous professional development (CPD) of coaches involves paying attention to learning and instructional design theories. Learning theories synthesize knowledge about adult learning and thus could serve as a conceptual framework for coaches´ professional bodies to understand better how people learn, but also design their activities supporting professional development on a solid theoretical basis and clear unified terminology.

One of the most influential theories in CPD has been experiential learning theory (ELT). We give this concept special attention, as a central concept within ELT is the role of reflection, which is also one of the salient factors we studied in our

research. By explaining ELT and its connection to coaching, we want to emphasize the importance of reflection in the coaching work.

According to Kolb (1984), ELT offers an approach to education and learning that is based on traditions of philosophy, social psychology and cognitive psychology. Many scholars, including William James, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky, have emphasized the central role of experience in the learning process (Kolb 2013:429). *´In ELT, learning is defined as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience´* (Kolb 2013:429).

Experiential learning is a dynamic integrated learning process which involves four separate stages: a concrete or physical experience, observation (noticing the experience) and reflection of what has occurred, and the formulating of abstract concepts and generalizations, before testing the concept or theory in new situations (Kolb/Rubin/Osland 1991).

Fazel (2013) pointed out the resemblance of the repetitive cycle of EL with the coaching process based on the GROW model in which the goal setting stems from the proposed experience, then reality is observed and – based on the reflected reality (re) conceptualization – possible options of actions are created and consequently tested and compared with the proposed experience. In models of coaching, the Kolb learning cycle can often be seen as guiding the process in every single session (Cox 2006).

In view of the above, ELT seems to be a suitable theoretical background for the CPD of coaches and explains the importance of (self)reflection, which we also study in our research. Application of ELT thus assumes that for an individual coach's development it is important to have experiences in the world, reflect on these, form hypotheses and test them to refine their knowledge. However, theories of learning and human development offer additional inspiration for the CPD of coaches. In this context, it is worth mentioning in particular those, which some authors consider being an integrated part of the coaching process itself – e.g. Fazel (2013) in addition to ELT highlights some cognitive and behavioral learning theories, which coaching integrates (classical conditioning, reinforcement and transformative learning); Law (2013) stresses in addition to the learning process as described in Kolb´s cycle reflective learning, constructive – developmental theories and social learning theories.

Another inspirational source of theoretical knowledge suitable for coaches´ CPD is instructional design theories. These have contributed to the formation of principles that promote learning through the learning environments, processes or products. Merrill (2002, p.43) identified five instructional design principles that are common to all these theories:

Learning is promoted when learners are engaged in solving real-world problems.

Learning is promoted when existing knowledge is activated as a foundation for new knowledge.

Learning is promoted when new knowledge is demonstrated to the learner.

Learning is promoted when new knowledge is applied by the learner.

Learning is promoted when new knowledge is integrated into the learner's world.

What do these principles mean for instructional practice? In short, we can describe them as follows: 1) The problem-oriented principle claims than an instruction should use a progression of increasingly complex whole tasks/problems; 2) The demonstration Principle highlights that instruction should guide learners through a skill and engage peer discussion/demonstration; 3) The Application Principle means that instruction should provide intrinsic or corrective feedback and engage peer-collaboration; 4) The Activation Principle stresses that instruction should build upon prior knowledge and encourage learners to acquire a structure for organizing new knowledge and 5) The Integration Principle points out instruction should engage learners in peer-critiques and synthesizing newly acquired knowledge.

The accreditation process of coaches, established by the main professional coaching associations, has the potential to implement the fundamental principles of theories of learning and instruction. Globally three coaching bodies have grown to dominate the profession: the International Coach Federation (ICF) with 35,000 members, the European Coaching and Mentoring Council (EMCC) with 30,000 members concentrated in Europe and the Association for Coaching (AC) with approximately 9,000 members. All of the three global professional bodies (ICF, AC and EMCC) view coach development not as an isolated training episode, but as a continuous process.

CPD in Visegrad Four countries

The Visegrad Four countries belong to the post-communist countries, which faced major economic and social transformations after 1989. In this context, change was also required to support wider organizational and managerial development. Executive coaching arrived after the millennium. The national branches of international coaching organizations were established: in 2008 in Hungary (EMCC), in 2005 and 2009 in the Czech Republic (ICF and EMCC respectively), in 2009 in Poland (EMCC) and in 2007 in Slovakia (ICF). Thus, in comparison with some European countries, despite having around a decade of coaching development, Visegrad Four countries have a much shorter history of general management development. This compares with the UK and US where the growth of management development dates back to the 1950 s, and coaching emerged as a leadership development tool during the late 1980 s.

Given this, we wanted to explore whether the Visegrad Four countries are similar to, or different from, wider European practices. Our study seeks to bring partial insights into the state of coaching in these four countries. We decided to choose these four countries and not the Eastern Europe as a whole as the four chosen countries in central Europe share many similar traits mentioned earlier, while Eastern Europe lacks consistent definition and is too diverse to be generalized together. It was also possible to delineate the state and development of national coaching in the four chosen countries, whereas specifying each individual coaching development in all the countries of Eastern Europe would be too ambitious. Therefore, we decided to narrow the focus on the Visegrad Four countries only.

Previous researchers also chose this direction and analyzed selected phenomena in the Visegrad Four context, such as diversity management (Eger et al. 2012), gender aspects of top management roles (Ubrežiová/Moravčíková 2014) or entrepreneurial intentions of students (Nowiński/Haddoud/Lančarič/Egerová/Czeglédi 2019). We want to follow this path of research with the focus on coaching.

We focused on answering the following questions: Are there any significant differences between the Visegrad Four countries and other European countries in coaches´ attitude towards their own development and training, reflective practice and supervision, in the areas of practice the coaches engage in or in the conceptualized coaching models the coaches prefer and are grounded in? Are there any significant differences between the developmental activities of Visegrad Four countries´ coaches, who are members of any professional coaching associations and those who are not? We will also review the use of coaching models and their application in different coaching scenarios.

Methods

The research sample is comprised of coaches from 50 European countries from Greenland to Russia, with a total population of approximately 800 million. In this sample, 419 respondents from Visegrad Four countries identified themselves as coaches when asked to describe themselves concerning coaching and mentoring. For comparison, we used the sample of European coaches. We excluded The Visegrad Four respondents from the European sample and there were 1745 European coaches from other European countries.

121 of the Visegrad Four participants (29 %) and 446 of the European participants of other countries (26 %) are members of the ICF, while 32 Visegrad Four participants (8 %) and 315 European participants (18 %) are members of the EMCC.

The survey questionnaire was designed in partnership with the EMCC. The original questionnaire was piloted on a UK sample and revised. The final survey comprised over 100 items and took on average 30 minutes to complete. Data was collected by a self-report questionnaire using a snowball sampling method. The questionnaire was published online, with a multi-language landing page that directed people to the language of their choice. Themes in the research included demographic information, coaching training, continuous professional development, ethical practice, and fee rates.

The project involved a transnational collaboration. Research teams were established in each participating country. Each team was asked to partner with local coaching, management, and HR organizations. In total over 100 professional bodies, including the three main professional coaching bodies (ICF, EMCC and AC), promoted the research through their websites, discussion forum and newsletters. This method was selected as it was recognized that while many coaching practitioners were members of professional coaching bodies, many coaches operated outside of these bodies (we estimated that over 50 % of practicing coaches in Europe are not members of a professional coaching body). Thus, to avoid a sample dominated by members of any of the three main global coaching bodies a snowball method was employed to achieve a wide dispersal and thus a more inclusive sample than simply focusing on the membership of a professional body. To further help maximum engagement, a local research team was established to help distribute the survey. The local research team made the decision on how this was achieved and whether and into which language/s the survey should be translated. In total, the survey was translated into 35 languages. Each translation was backward translated to ensure accuracy, and each survey piloted (Brislin 1980).

The questionnaire consisted of several parts, summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Questionnaire Main Sections

Coaching Practice & Rates
Supervision & reflective practice
Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
Areas of practice
Conceptual models
Evaluation
Contracting for Corporate Coaching assignments
Ethics & Contracting
Commission coaching

This paper deals with the results of four parts of the questionnaire: supervision & reflective practice, Continuous Professional Development (CPD), areas of practice and conceptual models.

Hypotheses and analysis

We used two statistical tests in our study. The first one, Pearson chi-square test (Chi-square test of independence, in short $\chi 2$) is used to determine if there is a significant relationship between two samples in the case of nominal data. In our case, we test the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the coaches´ country of practice (Visegrad Group x the rest of Europe) and a given characteristic (e.g., using supervision as a method of reflection).

To test whether the distribution in the two samples is the same, we used the non-parametric method of the Mann-Whitney test. This particular test tests if two independent samples come from populations, which have the same distribution. We chose this test as it is suitable for non-normal and ordinal data (McKnight/ Najab 2010).

Results

In this part, the results of the four following questionnaire sections will be presented:

- Supervision & reflective practice
- Continuous professional development (CPD)
- Areas of practice
- Conceptual models

Supervision & reflective practice

Respondents were asked to answer the question: ”What methods do you use to reflect on your practice“ and they were able to choose more than one answer.

Table 2: Methods of reflection used by coaches

	Visegrad 4 %	Europe %	chi2	p-value
Self-reflection	92 %	93 %	0,138	0,756
Reading coaching books	81 %	80 %	0,179	0,685
Peer network	60 %	74 %	33,022	0
Reading coaching research	47 %	61 %	26,356	0
Formal supervision with a qualified supervisor	46 %	48 %	0,257	0,625
Mentor	35 %	21 %	37,847	0

	Visegrad 4 %	Europe %	chi2	p-value
Self support	30 %	36 %	4,194	0,046
Co-mentoring	17 %	14 %	1,806	0,193
None	0 %	0 %	—	—

The most frequent answers in the Visegrad Four sample contained self-reflection (92 %), reading coaching books (81 %) and peer network (60 %), followed by reading coaching research (47 %), formal supervision (46 %), mentor (35 %), self-support (30 %), co-mentoring (17 %).

The association between the Visegrad Four countries and other European countries (Visegrad Four excluded) was tested (Pearson χ^2) and the result showed some significant differences. European coaches reported using significantly more of peer network (χ^2 = 33,022; p = 0), reading coaching research (χ^2 = 26,356; p = 0) and using self support (χ^2 = 4,194; p = 0,046). On the contrary, Visegrad Four coaches reported more often using a mentor (χ^2 = 37,847; p = 0).

Respondents were asked to evaluate how much time they spend on reflective practice per week with the following results.

Table 3: Time spent on reflective practices

	Visegrad 4 %	Europe %
Less than 60mins	21 %	27 %
60–90 minutes	45 %	43 %
90–120 minutes	19 %	20 %
120–240 minutes	9 %	7 %
More than 240 minutes	5 %	4 %

Most Visegrad Four respondents reported reflecting 60 – 90 minutes per week (45 %), followed by less than 60 minutes (21 %), 90 – 120 minutes per week (19 %) and 120 – 240 minutes per week (9 %). 5 % of the Visegrad Four respondents reported more than 240 minutes of reflection per week.

Coaches were asked how often they received formal coaching supervision.

Most frequently (32 %), the Visegrad Four respondents reported not receiving supervision at all. On the other hand, a similar number (28 %) of respondents receives 1 hour of supervision for every 25 hours or less of coaching with clients, followed by 1 hour of supervisor for every 26–50 hours of coaching with clients (22 %), 1 hour of supervisor for every 51–100 hours of coaching with clients and 1 hour of supervisor for more than 100 hours of coaching with clients (7 %). The difference between the Visegrad Four and European samples was tested (Mann-Whitney test) and showed no statistical difference in the two samples (U = 352851,5, p = 0,599).

Table 4: Coaching supervision

	Visegrad 4 %	Europe %
1 hour of supervisor for every 25 hours or less of coaching with clients	28 %	32 %
1 hour of supervisor for every 26–50 hours of coaching with clients	22 %	20 %
1 hour of supervisor for every 51–100 hours of coaching with clients	11 %	10 %
1 hour of supervisor for more than 100 hours of coaching with clients	7 %	4 %
I don't receive supervision	32 %	35 %

Continuous professional development (CPD)

Respondents were asked how they kept up to date in their coaching practice. Respondents could select more than one option from a list of alternatives.

Table 5: Methods of CPD

	Visegrad 4 %	Europe %	chi2	p-value
Reading coaching books	89 %	86 %	2,135	0,151
Attending coaching conferences	67 %	63 %	1,615	0,213
Attending short courses in coaching skills	64 %	57 %	6,245	0,013
Attending professional networking events ('coaching clubs' etc.)	57 %	57 %	0,01	0,956
Attending additional formal coaching training qualifications	52 %	45 %	6,494	0,012
Attending a peer coaching group	52 %	53 %	0,162	0,703
Reading coaching research	52 %	70 %	48,943	0
Participating in coaching webinars	46 %	55 %	11,464	0,01
Attending a coaching specific graduate program at a University/business school	12 %	10 %	1,797	0,202
None of the above	1 %	1 %	—	—

Respondents reported different kinds of continuous professional development methods. In the Visegrad Four sample, the most popular methods included reading coaching books (89 %), attending conferences (67 %), short courses in coaching skills (64 %), followed by professional networking events (57 %), formal coaching training qualification (52 %), peer coaching groups (52 %), coaching webinars (46 %), graduate programs at a university/business school (12 %). Only 1 % of the respondents reported not using any of the methods mentioned.

When compared with the European-wide sample, some significant differences were noted. The Visegrad Four respondents reported attending short courses in coaching skills (χ^2 = 6,245; p = 0,013) and formal coaching training qualifications (χ^2 = 6,494; p = 0, 012) more. On the other hand, European coaches reported more often reading coaching research (χ^2 = 48,943; p = 0) and participating in coaching webinars (χ^2 = 11,464; p = 0,01).

Areas of practice

Coaches were also asked in which areas they practice.

Table 6: Areas of practice

	Visegrad 4 %	Europe %	chi2	p-value
Careers coaching	69 %	64 %	3,713	0,06
Performance & leadership coaching	67 %	82 %	48,891	0
Life & well-being coaching	66 %	45 %	60,989	0
General workplace coaching	61 %	66 %	3,86	0,052
Education coaching	27 %	18 %	17,204	0
Mental health coaching	16 %	14 %	1,303	0,282
Other	16 %	13 %	3,147	0,076
Medical / health coaching	8 %	7 %	0,064	0,835
Driver coaching	1 %	1 %	__	
Safety coaching	1 %	1 %	__	

Most frequently, Visegrad Four coaches practice in the areas of careers coaching (69 %), performance and leadership coaching (67 %) and life and well-being coaching (66 %), followed by general workplace coaching (61 %), education coaching (27 %), mental health coaching (16 %), other areas of coaching (16 %) and medical/health coaching (8 %). Few or no Visegrad Four coaches practice in the areas of driver coaching (1 %), safety coaching (1 %), coaching homeless people (1 %) or coaching in prison or with ex-offenders (0 %).

There are some significant differences between Visegrad Four and European-wide coaches. While European coaches practice significantly more in the area of performance and leadership coaching (χ^2 = 48,891; p = 0), Visegrad Four coaches practice in life and well-being coaching (χ^2 = 60,989; p = 0) and education coaching (χ^2 = 17,204; p = 0).

Conceptual models

Coaches were asked to state what models they used in their coaching practice. Respondents could select more than one option from a list of alternatives.

Table 7: Conceptual models

	Visegrad 4 %	Europe %	chi2	p-value
Behavioural / Goal focused coaching (GROW model)	79 %	83 %	3,533	0,066
Solution focused	58 %	51 %	8,146	0,05
Cognitive Behavioural Coaching	35 %	40 %	4,666	0,031
NLP	34 %	42 %	8,178	0,05
Other	27 %	28 %	0,167	0,716
Motivational Interviewing	21 %	17 %	2,836	0,103
Transactional Analysis	20 %	37 %	42,418	0
Gestalt	16 %	22 %	63,234	0
Transpersonal	9 %	10 %	0,027	0,926
Psychodynamic	7 %	14 %	14,489	0
Existential	6 %	9 %	3,297	0,082

Most frequent answers were behavioural/goal focused coaching (79 %), solution focused approach (58 %) and cognitive behavioural coaching (35 %) followed by NLP (34 %), other approaches (27 %), motivational interviewing (21 %), Transactional Analysis (20 %), gestalt coaching (16 %), transpersonal approach (9 %), psychodynamic approach (7 %) and existential approach (6 %).

Some significant differences were found between European and Visegrad Four respondents. Cognitive behavioural coaching ($\chi^2 = 4{,}666$; $p = 0{,}031$), NLP ($\chi^2 = 8{,}178$; $p = 0{,}05$), transactional analysis ($\chi^2 = 42{,}418$; $p = 0$) and psychodynamic approach ($\chi^2 = 14{,}489$,; $p = 0$) were reported more often by the European respondents. On the other hand, Visegrad Four respondents reported using more of the solution-focused approach ($\chi^2 = 8{,}146$; $p = 0{,}05$).

Discussion

In this part, we try to explain some of the discrepancies between the groups, one by one. While we are not sure, why these differences occur, we try to address the possible explanations. In the second part, we outline some possible future research directions.

The Visegrad Four coaches differ in the means of reflection they use. In the European-wide sample, peer-network, reading coaching research and self-support were used more commonly, whereas having a mentor was more frequently reported in the Visegrad Four sample. There might be several reasons for this discrepancy. As the Visegrad Four coaching market might not be as well established as in some other European countries (e.g., UK), some means of reflective practice such as peer groups might not be as accessible. Nevertheless, the Viseg-

rad Four group did not vary significantly in reporting the use of formal supervision. Reflecting coaching practice is a crucial part of the process. As explained in the introductory part, for learning to occur, it is essential to apply new knowledge in the real world situation, test it and reflect on it (e.g., Kolb 2013; Merrill 2002). In order to know, which knowledge is valid, it is useful to follow research, where techniques are tested and approaches corroborated.

These discrepancies may also reflect differences in professional body positions on supervision, with the ICF adopting a more skeptical perspective, while both the AC and EMCC view supervision as mandatory. An alternative explanation is that the lower levels of supervision could reflect the less developed nature of the market within Visegrad Four countries. Evidence on engagement with supervision (Hawkins/Turner/Passmore 2019) suggests that supervision engagement develops with the coaching market, and may be linked to sponsor organizations asking about supervision arrangements when procuring organizational coaches.

The Visegrad Four coaches exhibit some differences from their European peers in the ways they keep up to date in their practice. They more frequently reported attending additional formal coaching training qualifications and short courses in coaching skills. At the same time, Visegrad Four coaches read less coaching research and participate in coaching webinars significantly less than their European-wide peers. Again, coaching research and webinars might be less accessible in the national languages. In addition, coaches in the four countries might prefer more traditional means of learning such as formal training and short face to face courses.

This suggests that as professional bodies develop, one way to enhance engagement may be to provide more content in local languages; such as webinars. A second implication is for researchers and journal publishers. While we would argue that coaching needs to be an evidenced-based discipline, the dominance of English language journals can make accessing this research more difficult for non-English speakers. These results are not shared by other surveys, such as the ICF Global Survey, which is conducted in a limited range of languages and thus excludes those who are unable to speak multiple languages. A second implication is for national researchers in Visegrad Four and other minority language countries, who could collaborate with local professional body groups to summarise and translate key research, making it more accessible to non-English speaking audiences.

The European-wide coaches practice more in the area of performance and leadership coaching, whereas the Visegrad Four sample reported practicing more in life coaching and education coaching. The popularity of life coaching might be problematic in the case of some clients. As previous authors found out, life coaching is often interchanged for other interventions such as psychotherapy or counseling (Spence/Grant 2005). Coaching is a substitute as it might be seen as

less stigmatizing than those interventions (Marschal 2006). It is also generally less regulated and practitioners require fewer hours of training to achieve accreditation than in therapy. This might point to the risk that clients may be accessing services that are inappropriate, offered by practitioners who are less well trained to deal with the issues. Regulation and enhancements to ethical standards are ways this can be managed, ensuring that clients are redirected to the appropriate service through referral.

The Visegrad Four coaches also differed in the conceptual models and approached they used in their practice. In the European sample, cognitive-behavioral coaching, NLP (Neuro-linguistic programming), transactional analysis, gestalt, and psychodynamic approach were reported more often. The Visegrad Four coaches reported using the solution-focused approach significantly more. Again, this may reflect the training providers who are dominant in each market. As each training provider often brings their specific approach model – with two or three specific NLP and Solution-focused providers being large players in Visegrad Four countries, while the UK, German and Nordic markets are more mixed, with multiple providers including universities offering coach training.

In the future, researchers should focus on trying to explain the differences between the two groups. One of the possible methods could be interviewing the stakeholders of the coaching businesses on national levels and trying to find the explanations we indicated (e.g., the market maturity, services accessibility and so on). We also see the whole topic of reflection as an extremely important topic. As we explained by using the learning theories and models, reflecting on the practice should be taken as an integral part of the coaching process. Knowledge has to be evaluated and reflected on in order to be used again, and this holds true for coaching practice as well as for other interventions.

Conclusion

The European coaching research study is the largest and most inclusive research study undertaken to date of coaching practices across Europe, through its use of 35 languages and inclusion of 50 European countries. It provides some insights into similarities and differences between the Visegrad Four countries and wider Europe. These may be explained by the history of the development of coaching and national culture.

Key results from the study included significant differences in the use of methods of reflection such as reading coaching research, attending peer networks, using a mentor, or attending webinars. There were also significant differences in the areas which coaches pursue. Visegrad Four coaches coach significantly more in the area of life and well-being coaching and education coaching and less in the area of performance coaching. We also explored the coaching approaches and found that cognitive-behavioral coaching, NLP, transactional analysis and gestalt

coaching are significantly more popular in the European sample while a solution-focused approach is used more in the Visegrad Four countries sample. We try to provide an explanation for the discrepancies and offer ideas for future research directions.

We believe that while national and regional differences should be respected and encouraged, more can be done to ensure coaching quality. Moreover, we highlight that the development of best practices is made available through national languages if engagement is to be maximized.

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