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# The impressions of industrial psychologists of their proficiency as coaches

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**Orientation:** Coaching's expansion is driven by its impact on job performance and wellbeing through positive reinforcement and goal achievement. Working as coaches for individuals, teams, and organisations, industrial psychologists often report feeling inadequately prepared for their coaching roles.

**Research purpose:** The objective of this study was to explore industrial psychologists functioning as coaches, and, their training and development needs related to coaching in the workplace.

**Motivation for the study:** Coaching is driven by its benefits for job performance and wellbeing, highlighting a challenge where many industrial psychologists, frequently acting as coaches, feel unprepared.

**Research approach, design and method:** A qualitative research approach with an interpretivism paradigm was employed in this study. The participants, industrial psychologists and interns (*N* = 17) were approached using snowball sampling. The data was captured with qualitative surveys and analysed using thematic analysis.

**Main findings:** The results showed that some participants felt confident since they experienced certainty of coaching psychology theories and the role of self-awareness in shaping their coaching methods. Some participants experienced less confidence in their coaching abilities and highlighted the need for supervision from a mentor in sound coaching practices. The participants reported a need for further development in skills such as emotional competence, and theoretical and technological knowledge and practice management.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Coaching interventions by industrial psychologists can enhance employee strengths, boosting organisational returns and promoting a triple-bottom-line.

**Contribution/value-add:** An industrial psychologist committed to coaching development can significantly boost both personal and organisational growth.

**Keywords:** Coaching Psychology, Industrial and Psychology, coaching, skills development, coaching skills.

## Introduction

Industrial and organisational psychologists provide an essential service to enhance organisational stability and promote the well-being of employees (Du Plessis & Thomas, 2021). Within organisations, industrial and organisational psychologists (IOPs) have a variety of work roles and functions to fulfil. These roles include those of a scientist, researcher, strategic partner, enabler, developer, and counsellor, to name a few (Barnard & Fourie, 2007). Jorgensen et al. (2016) emphasise the roles of people developer, which includes the role of a coach in an organisational setting and further includes other roles such as academic, change agent, and mentor.

Vostanis and Bell (2020) predict that the rates of various mental health conditions and relational tensions will increase over time because of the sudden effects of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on economies, communities, and individuals. This may include, among other mental health conditions, increased rates of panic attacks, anxiety or post-traumatic stress symptoms, and depression. Also, technological advancements and the future world of work require a new set of skills from employees despite the emotional demands and challenges they might face (Qiu et al., 2021). Reczek (2018) argues that one of the main functions of coaching is to assist individuals in developing their skills and improving their performance, which would contribute to coping

with a challenging environment. Therefore, this study explored how IOPs perceive their competence in coaching to understand their readiness to offer such support services within organisations. To achieve the study's aim, the subsequent research aims were established.

# Research purpose

The general research objective of this study was to explore the impressions of IOPs on their competence as coaches and also to explore their training needs related to coaching in the workplace. In light of this general objective of the study, the following research questions were posed to address the general research objective:

- What are the impressions of IOPs regarding their competence in coaching?
- What are the IOPs' training needs to equip them as coaches?

# Literature review
## Coaching

The use of coaching has experienced steady growth over the past two decades (Grant, 2016). Coaching has emerged as an influential practice in various sectors, including education, healthcare, and the corporate world. Such a rise in popularity highlights the need for research to understand its applications and overall impact better. According to Boyatzis et al. (2022), it is important to study and improve the knowledge of coaching in order to develop and enhance the practice of coaching in society (p. 203).

The Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA, 2023) defines coaching as:

> [A] professional, collaborative, and outcomes-driven method of learning that seeks to develop an individual and raise self-awareness so that he or she might achieve specific goals and perform at a more effective level. (p. 1)

Grant (2016) emphasises that coaching is an approach that explicitly focuses on enhancing both the performance and wellbeing of individuals and organisations in sustainable and meaningful ways. Literature shows that coaching significantly improves attributes such as self-acceptance and confidence, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, self-regulation, workplace learning and performance, resilience, personal responsibility, and wellbeing (Jarosz, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). These attributes are especially necessary to cope in a challenging VUCA environment (Wilson & Lawton-Smith, 2016). VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) was a widely accepted term used to describe uncertain and complex business landscapes (Bawany, 2016). However, in recent years, and particularly with the rise of disruptive events like the pandemic, a new acronym BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible) has been suggested as a more apt descriptor of current organisational challenges (Cascio, 2022; Sidor-Rzadkowska, 2022). Cascio (2022) describes the current

challenges as Brittle, where stable structures can become fragile. Anxious indicates the uncertainty that triggers emotional responses. Nonlinear reflects that cause-and-effect relationships are not predictable. Incomprehensible refers to situations that are hard to understand and predict fully. Therefore, coaching becomes a critical developmental tool in such an environment (Bawany, 2016).

Effective coaching interventions could prepare an organisation for the changing world of work. A global shift in focus exists on aspects such as cocreation (cultivate deep relationships), teamwork, and empowering employees to adapt to the changing work environment (Deloitte Insights, 2023). Coaching directly influences employees' organisational commitment as they align their individual goals with the organisation's (Park et al., 2021). Employees feel that a sense of involvement is created when the organisation is committed to its employees, which evokes a willingness to stay with the company (Park et al., 2021). This means that effective coaching opportunities could contribute towards employee retention and assist organisations in retaining and preparing their human capital for the future world of work.

Coaching involves a facilitative role where the coach focuses on the scientific exploration of behaviour, cognition, and emotions within coaching practice (Passmore, 2011). Given their expertise in human behaviour, IOPs are ideally situated to facilitate such growth opportunities. Research shows the significance of the IOP's role as a people developer, suggesting that IOPs should employ coaching as a method for employee development (Barkhuizen et al., 2015; Van Zyl et al., 2016). According to the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2019), IOPs should be well-versed in coaching methods to facilitate career guidance, performance enhancement, crisis intervention, and addressing workplace psychopathology. The HPCSA stresses the need for IOPs to be proficient in coaching methods (HPCSA, 2019). Although coaching is about people development, a realm that naturally falls within the IOP's domain (HPCSA, 2019; Jorgensen et al., 2016), studies found that IOPs still need to be adequately prepared for their role of supporting employees in the workplace effectively (Barkhuizen et al., 2015; Du Plessis & Thomas, 2021). Thus, IOPs must seek development opportunities to equip themselves with the competencies to facilitate employee development.

## Coaching psychology

Coaching psychology draws its foundation from models rooted in established frameworks of adult learning and psychology (Passmore & Lai, 2019). The common purpose is to advance evidence-based practices by obtaining a psychological understanding of typical human functioning (Passmore & Lai, 2019). Odendaal and Le Roux (2016) describe coaching psychology as applying diverse psychological theories and principles tailored to individuals, groups, organisations, and communities within a specific cultural context. Coaching in these contexts includes a

collaborative approach between the coach and the client, whereby the client aims to reach a desired goal or state of development (Grant, 2010). According to Passmore and Lai (2019), the field of psychology contributes significantly to shaping contemporary coaching research, specifically frameworks from psychotherapy and organisational psychology. Therefore, it is within the realms of industrial and organisational psychology to understand what coaching psychology entails and redefine how coaching is applied in the workplace. Thus, conducting a study focused on IOPs appears particularly relevant, given their role as people developers, or in this context, as coaches. Coaching could be a valuable method for IOPs in organisational contexts, provided they understand what effective coaching of employees or teams entails. Thus, the research study aimed to explore industrial psychologists' impressions of their competence as workplace coaches. The study further aimed to explore the training needs of IOPs to equip these practitioners with the skills and knowledge to function effectively as coaches.

# Research methodology

The following section consists of the research approach, strategy, and method.

## Research design

A qualitative approach was followed as the study is explorative in nature and aims to explore the IOP's role as a coach. An interpretivism paradigm was used to understand the perceptions of the research participants regarding their competence as workplace coaches. The study utilised explorative and qualitative data to explore the role of the IOP as a coach. As Creswell (2014) pointed out, qualitative research is rooted in assumptions and underlying theories that require investigation to elucidate and potentially address human or social issues. A qualitative approach involves a systematic inquiry into the meanings individuals employ to comprehend their experiences and guide their actions (McLeod, 2013). The research employed the interpretivism paradigm to understand participants' perceptions of their role as coaches. According to Jansen (2016), interpretivism revolves around the significance individuals attribute to their experiences. This was undertaken to better understand the diverse interpretations IOPs assigned to their coaching role.

## Research strategy

This study followed a qualitative descriptive research strategy to explore the participants' perceptions regarding their role as people developers, specifically as coaches. This strategy enabled the researchers to gain insights into how the participants perceived the phenomenon being studied. Moreover, it aided in comprehending the participants' experiences related to the research topic (Kim et al., 2017). Consequently, this strategy proved instrumental in interpreting the participants' perspectives and encounters

with coaching. De Vos et al. (2011) state that descriptive research involves investigating a clearly defined subject to extract deeper meanings from the participants engaged in the study. Here, the focus was on the meanings contributed by IOPs relating to coaching.

## Research method

The researchers collected data from registered industrial psychology practitioners (i.e. industrial psychologists and industrial psychology interns) from various working industries who voluntarily completed a qualitative survey. Initially, interviews were planned in different provinces within South Africa, such as Gauteng, North-West, and Western Cape. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers had to change the research setting to an online space to comply with mandatory regulations at that time. This meant that some participants would no longer experience geographical constraints, and more willing participants across the country shared their experiences and completed the electronic interviewing surveys.

## Research participants and sampling methods

After obtaining approval for the study from the tertiary institute's faculty committees, the researchers extracted a list of all industrial psychologists registered at the HPCSA's website. The researchers searched for the participants' contact details either on the HPCSA's iRegister page or on the LinkedIn platform. The same process was followed on the website of the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa (SIOPSA) as the researchers extracted a list of IOP coaching practitioners.

The researchers employed snowball sampling, which ensured that the best-suited individuals for the purposes of this study were approached. Snowball sampling is a non-probability method commonly used in qualitative studies. It includes obtaining references from participants who adhere to the characteristics required for the specific research study (Struwig & Stead, 2013). The sampling method assisted the researchers in approaching individuals with extensive industrial psychology-related expertise and knowledge, especially regarding the topic of the study until data saturation was reached (Etikan et al., 2016).

The total sample population consisted of ($N$ = 17) participants who met the following criteria: (1) registered at the HPCSA as IOPs or intern IOPs; (2) based in South Africa; and (3) working as IOPs in consultancy practices or industry. Of the 17 participants, 64.71% of the participants were female, while 35.29% of the participants were male. The majority of the participants were between 20 years and 35 years of age (58.82%) and mostly Afrikaans-speaking (70.59%), followed by English (23.53%) and Tswana-speaking (5.88%). Furthermore, individuals across the country participated in the study, with the majority of

participants located in Gauteng (41.18%), and the rest of the participants attended from Free State (17.65%), Eastern Cape (5.88%), Northwest (23.53%), Western Cape (5.88%), and KwaZulu-Natal (5.88%). The study's participants are identified in the findings section by several criteria, including their assigned number (e.g. Participant 1), gender (e.g. Male/Female), age (e.g. 31 years old), job role (e.g. HR manager), and the frequency of their coaching activities (e.g. bimonthly). It should be noted that despite the variety in job roles, all participants are either registered IOPs or interns in the same field.

## Data collection

This study used a qualitative survey managed through *QuestionPro*. Survey methodologies allow users to create, distribute, and analyse surveys and questionnaires and are regarded as popular in the social sciences (Cottrell, 2014; Marks, 2004). According to a study conducted by Elbeck (2014), QuestionPro presents a defendable choice because of its user-friendly interface and robust features, which align with educational goals. This platform automatically assigned codes to the participants, and their responses were collected anonymously, ensuring their privacy was respected (Struwig & Stead, 2013). Qualitative surveys were the preferred method as the sample size was relatively small and the surveys were compiled in a noncomplex manner (Lavrakas, 2008). The qualitative survey provided flexibility for the participants as they could use technology to partake in the study. Ultimately, the flexibility of participating in the study without travelling to a venue to complete paper-and-pencil interviews reduced costs and saved time.

Prior to collecting data, the researchers sent emails to the participants, which contained all the necessary information about the study and what their participation would entail, such as voluntary participation, withdrawal from the research process at any point in time, the use of data, and data storage to protect the privacy of personal information. The researchers invited the participants to inform them if anyone could not participate in the study because of data constraints so that data could be purchased and sent to those in need. Thereafter, the participants could decide whether they wished to continue to complete the online surveys and had to provide their informed consent in doing so. The survey questions were the following:

1. What is your understanding of coaching in the workplace?
2. Do you function as a people developer, specifically as a coach, in your field of work?
3. Do you feel competent working as a coach? Explain why/why not.
4. Do you have a desire to further develop your coaching skills?
5. If you could develop yourself more as a coach, what skills would you like to acquire?

## Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

In order to ensure that the data were of high quality and trustworthy, the strategies proposed by Anney (2015) were followed. In order to establish credibility, the participants voluntarily participated in the study, which increased the likelihood of gaining authentic responses from them. Transferability was ensured by conducting the research study so that the findings could be applied in other research contexts that go beyond the study circumstances (Maxwell, 2021). Although a detailed summary of the research setting and findings was compiled for the reader, the researchers kept the identities of the participants anonymous.

Trochim (2006) describes dependability as another form of reliability. A research study is deemed reliable when the researchers provide well-documented research that would produce the same or similar results should the study be reconducted (Anney, 2015; Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). The researchers accurately described the details of the research process and the research methodology to ensure that future researchers could replicate the study in the future to conduct further studies on the topic. The researchers were mindful to take an objective approach to managing the research process. Confirmability was obtained in this study as the researchers accurately described the perceptions and experiences of the participants and not their view of the participants' responses. This was further established with the assistance of the co-coder, who also took on an objective role and reviewed the themes and sub-themes found in the study.

## Data analysis

The researchers used thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2014) to analyse the data retrieved for this study. Braun et al. (2014) describe thematic analysis as the process of data coding as it revolves around finding new information in data while referring to previously discovered findings in research. In this study, the researchers also followed the steps of thematic data analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006). After familiarising themselves with the data, the researchers compiled notes while reading through the data to evoke thought processing and to document impressions of the data. This enabled the researchers to generate codes for different categorial groups that were found in the data. The patterns found in the data were coded in a structured and systematic way. The researchers referred to the research objectives and research questions as guidelines to identify patterns in the data that could relate to themes and sub-themes. The researchers gathered a list of codes and decided on categories that best described the patterns found in the data set. Once codes had been assigned to the data, the researchers and the co-coder searched for distinct themes and sub-themes in the data.

The phase of reviewing themes was crucial as a thematic analysis map was generated to identify whether any existing themes overlapped or should have been presented as

separate themes. The data set was reviewed to ensure that the researchers did not overlook any additional themes during the previous phases. The researchers focused on describing the meaning of the themes and the link between the themes and the data findings (Nowell et al., 2017). After careful consideration, the researchers named the various themes and sub-themes found in the data.

In the last phase of the data analysis process, the researchers wrote a report on the data findings. The report included a summary of the themes and sub-themes that were found in the data and whether they corresponded with or contradicted previous literature on the research topic. The report told an overarching story of the IOPs' experiences as coaches, including their training needs to further equip them with the necessary skills to effectively fulfil their role as coaches.

### Ethical considerations

The research application was reviewed by the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC). The study was approved and the approval number NWU-0055-20-A4 was awarded. The researchers kept ethical considerations in mind as the nature of this study included the participation of people. The researchers complied with the *Protection of Personal Information Act* of 2013 by ensuring that no harm was done to anyone, informed consent was obtained prior to commencing with the study, and participants' privacy was respected and honoured (Struwig & Stead, 2013). The electronic surveys were also answered in an anonymous manner which further ensured the confidentiality of the participants (De Vos et al., 2011). The transcribed data were securely stored on a password-protected file, and only the researchers could access these files to code the data.

Next follows the results related to the impressions of the participants regarding their functioning as people developers in the capacity of coaches.

## Results

The findings of the research study were arranged into three categories, namely, impressions of coaching (Category 1 – see Figure 1), impressions of coaching competence (Category 2 – see Figure 2), and training needs of IOPs as coaches (Category 3 – see Figure 3) with themes, and sub-themes, and the researchers included direct quotations from the participants to support the research findings.

Following next are illustrations with descriptions of the three categories as mentioned earlier.

### Category 1: Impressions of coaching

The findings of category 1 were obtained by posing the questions of what the participants' understanding of coaching was, and whether they function in the role of a people developer, specifically as a coach, in their field of work.
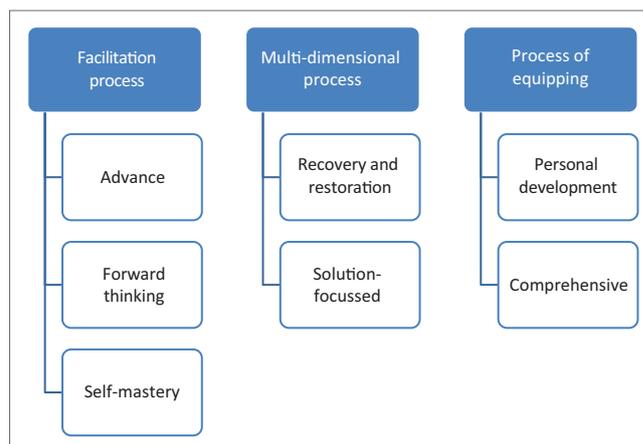


*Source*: Adapted from De Bruin, I.A. (2022). Exploring the application of the framework for inspiring growth as a coaching model for industrial and organisational psychologists. (Unpublished master's mini-dissertation). North-Wet University, Potchefstroom Campus

**FIGURE 1:** Category 1: Impressions of industrial and organisational psychologists regarding coaching.
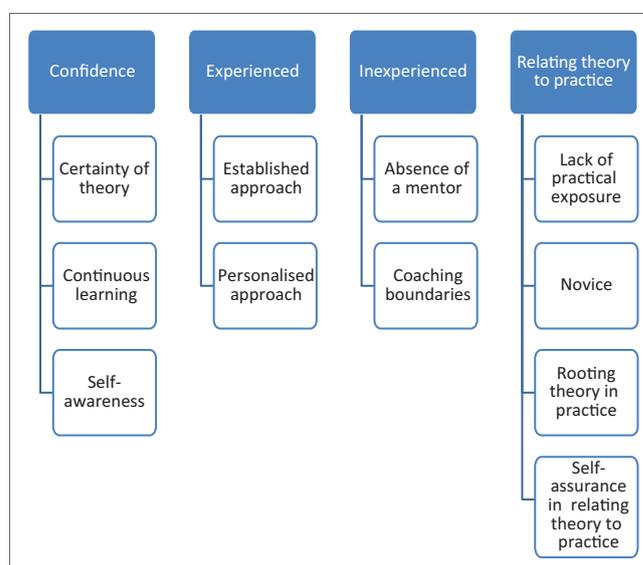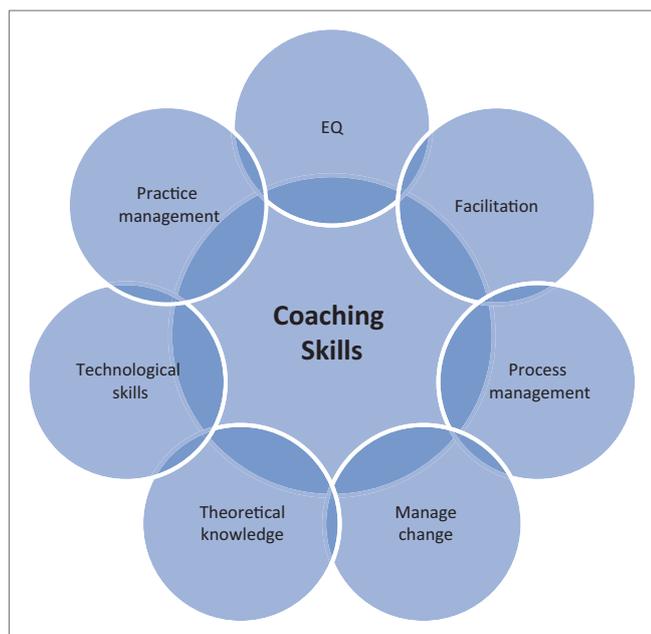


*Source*: Adapted from De Bruin, I.A. (2022). Exploring the application of the framework for inspiring growth as a coaching model for industrial and organisational psychologists. (Unpublished master's mini-dissertation). North-Wet University, Potchefstroom Campus

**FIGURE 2:** Category 2: Impressions of industrial and organisational psychologists regarding competence.

From the participants' viewpoints, coaching assumes the role of a facilitation process aimed at propelling personal advancement and growth. The participants conveyed that this approach involves addressing developmental areas to foster an individual's progress in life. Participant 8 stated:

> 'Coaching is a process that aims to improve performance and focuses on the 'here and now' rather than the distant past or future. Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.' (Male, 32 years old, Coach, Frequency of coaching: weekly)

An essential thread emerging from participant responses was the concept of forward-thinking guidance intrinsic to the coaching process. The participants depicted the IOP coach as a guide leading clients to self-discovery and realising their latent capabilities, potentially leading to self-mastery.

Source: Adapted from De Bruin, I.A. (2022). Exploring the application of the framework for inspiring growth as a coaching model for industrial and organisational psychologists. (Unpublished master's mini-dissertation). North-Wet University, Potchefstroom Campus
EQ, emotional competence.

**FIGURE 3:** Category 3: Training needs in coaching skills of industrial and organisational psychologists.

The respondents' perspectives underlined that coaching should be steered towards cultivating personal and employee development. This entails joining the client on a transformative journey to unlock potential, overcome obstacles, and reach objectives. Participant 14 captured this idea, highlighting how coaches help clients overcome challenges and reach personal growth goals:

> 'Coaching should be geared towards the facilitation of employee and individual development, walking with the individual on a journey for them to unlock their potential, overcome their obstacles and achieve their objectives.' (Female, 32 years old, Private practice, Frequency of coaching: rarely)

The findings further illuminate that the participants perceived coaching as a multi-dimensional process encompassing aspects of recovery, restoration, and solution-focused problem-solving methodologies. Participants recognised coaching as a means to navigate challenging experiences, employing psychological tools such as trauma counselling skills or psychometric testing to sustain the process. Additionally, the participants highlighted the solution-focused nature of coaching, emphasising problem-solving while maintaining a constructive mindset. The participants responded that the IOP coach is responsible for being a people-developer who should assist the client in addressing developmental areas and finding appropriate growth interventions, as articulated by Participant 13:

> 'Identifying areas of development of employees and actively seeking ways to find appropriate growth interventions.' (Female, 25 years old, Intern, Frequency of coaching: informally)

The findings also revealed that the process of equipping during coaching should take place on a comprehensive level. This inclusiveness was characterised by Participant 17, who highlighted the need for coaching to embrace individuals' values and beliefs. A comprehensive approach was reaffirmed by Participant 7, who underscored coaching's role in enhancing self-understanding, goal-setting, and exploration of new possibilities as individuals progress in life:

> 'To assist an employee through self-understanding, to develop and to grow as a person, to have goals and to explore options in the way forward.' (Female, 38 years old, Coach, Frequency of coaching: weekly)

From the findings, it can be concluded that the participants viewed their client as a holistic human being, comprising multiple facets and dynamics that should be considered during the coaching process. The participants indicated that this comprehensive perspective should guide the coaching process, as elucidated by Participant 5 (Female, 62 years old, Director, Frequency of coaching: quarterly), who encapsulated the concept of addressing an individual's life's physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional dimensions.

Following the earlier reflections on the participant's impressions of coaching, the researchers illustrated their conceptualisation of category 1 as Impressions of coaching (refer to Figure 1).

How the participants reflected on their competence as coaches is discussed next.

## Category 2: Impressions of coaching competence

The category was formed by asking the participants if they consider themselves competent in coaching. The findings reveal that participants' confidence levels in their coaching abilities vary and are influenced by several factors, which were categorised into sub-themes: certainty of theory, continuous learning, and self-awareness.

The participants understood diverse coaching models and theories drawn from existing literature. They displayed confidence rooted in their understanding of established concepts. However, it was emphasised that being well-grounded goes beyond theoretical comprehension. Participants underscored the importance of coaches having a solid foundation encompassing ethics, values, identity, role clarity, and an awareness of the relevant legal and regulatory frameworks. This need for comprehensive grounding was captured by Participant 16, who suggested employing the SMART framework as a practical tool for this purpose:

> '… [I]t is also imperative that the Coach themselves is well grounded in numerous aspects. They should be well grounded in terms of their ethics, values, identity, role and understand the legislation and framework that they work within … The coach facilitates the process and guidance is dependent on the coach's knowledge competencies and skills and their ability to facilitate the growth or forward thing process with the client. They should be able to identify issues and provide interventions, activities to help a client overcome these problems, driving individual

growth, and allowing the individuals to flourish and achieve goals which have been identified early in the process. The SMART framework is always an easy way to drive this process.' (Female, 45 years old, Lecturer, Frequency of coaching: monthly)

The majority of participants expressed comfort in employing their own established coaching approaches. This familiarity with their methods allowed them to navigate coaching interactions confidently. In contrast, some participants preferred personalised approaches tailored to individual coachee needs. An example of such an approach was provided by Participant 8:

'Unless it is something specific like productivity, I use an approach called Appreciative Coaching based on the Positive Psychology sub-field of Appreciative Inquiry. It sees the coachee as someone to appreciate and admire and goes through a process of using what is best of that person as resources to help them face their challenges.' (Male, 32 years old, Coach, Frequency of coaching: weekly)

Another subtheme was to apply continuous learning in the coaching domain to increase competencies as coaches. One participant mentioned that it was an essential part of her development as a coach before she started to coach others:

'I feel I have done a lot of personal development myself before embarking as a coach …'. (Male, 28 years old, Private Practice, Frequency of coaching: novice)

Moreover, some participants considered self-awareness to be a critical component to enhancing one's competence as a coach, such as the following quote indicates: 'They also need to be extremely self-aware, understanding their own prejudice and bias and how it influences interactions'. (Female, 45 years old, Lecturer, Frequency of coaching: monthly)

The theme 'experienced' was formed as it is evident that a significant portion of participants demonstrate a sense of proficiency and comfort in applying their established coaching approaches. This confidence is rooted in their established and personalised approaches, experience, and knowledge. Notably, one participant integrated her religious beliefs into their coaching approach, relying on guidance from her faith. Additionally, participants emphasised the role of self-awareness in shaping their coaching methods. Some participants preferred personalised coaching strategies, which drew from their own life experiences or individual personality traits. This personalised approach highlights the uniqueness of each coaching relationship and emphasises the role of the coach's background in influencing the coaching process. Participant 16 recognises the value of employing psychometric tools and open discussions in their coaching practice. This combination of approaches is seen as an effective way to enhance the coaching process, potentially providing valuable insights and facilitating productive discussions:

'A psychometric foundation in combination with a clarifying discussion and career counselling process.' (Female, 45 years old, Lecturer, Frequency of coaching: monthly)

A few participants acknowledged that they needed to be more experienced and exhibit more confidence in coaching because of various factors. Some of the participants attributed the reason for their inexperience in the field of coaching to a lack of appropriate mentorship. Other participants attributed the inexperience to needing more practical exposure and specialised training. The participants highlight the necessity for additional support, education, and self-awareness to enhance their coaching proficiency within the context of IOP.

Some participants indicated that the boundaries between coaching and counselling can, sometimes, be indistinct, resulting in vagueness regarding the suitable application of coaching or counselling techniques. One participant mentioned that coaching may include giving advice or that coaching is often approached informally, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

'Life- and career coaching is used on an informal basis where employees ask for advice or just need someone to listen to their personal problems. These sessions are not planned, but I appreciate that employees know there is someone who can help them.' (Male, 47 years old, HR manager, Frequency of coaching: weekly)

Another participant also mentioned that coaches should gain more experience in becoming aware of their prejudices and biases and how it may impact the coaching processes:

'They also need to be extremely self-aware, understanding their own prejudice and bias and how it influences interactions.' (Female, 45 years old, Lecturer, Frequency of coaching: monthly)

Most participants indicated they have a prominent theoretical understanding of coaching but need more practical exposure to relating theory to practice. The participants recognised the gap between their theoretical understanding of coaching and their ability to apply it effectively in real-world settings. The theme highlights the need for skill development and the importance of cultivating confidence to bridge this gap. The findings further emphasise the importance of being well-versed in theory to confidently apply the theory in the practical complexities of coaching within the realm of IOP. Some participants indicated that they still need to develop their coaching skills, and these participants can be referred to as novices. These participants acknowledge their status as learners in the early stages of their careers as IOPs. They admit to needing time to cultivate their practical coaching skills and bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application, as can be seen in these excerpts:

'The practical skills take time to develop. I always revise theory before coaching sessions to ensure I provide the best service.' (Female, 62 years old, Director, Frequency of coaching: quarterly)

'I believe I still have to grow in my profession as I am still just starting out.' (Male, 41 years old, Lecturer, Frequency of coaching: bimonthly)

Additionally, the theme accentuates the significance of confidence in practical coaching scenarios. One participant emphasises a need for further development driven by a need for more confidence in his role as a coach. This sentiment

illustrates the dynamic between self-confidence and the effective application of coaching techniques:

'I don't feel competent yet. I feel that I still have a lot of personal and professional development that I need to do for myself first.' (Female, 25 years old, Intern, Frequency of coaching: informally)

Following the above reflections on the participant's impressions of their competence as coaches, the researchers illustrated their conceptualisation of category 2 as the Impressions of IOPs regarding competence portrayed in Figure 2.

The participants identified training requirements necessary for their development as coaches, reflected as the third category.

## Category 3: Training needs to equip industrial and organisational psychologists as coaches

The findings of Category 3 were obtained by posing the question of whether the participants have a desire to further develop their coaching skills, with specific reference to the skills they felt they needed. The participants' needs illustrate the dynamic and varied essence of coaching expertise, indicating the dynamic combination of theory and practical application intrinsic to effective coaching practices.

Many participants considered developing interpersonal skills and emotional competence (EQ) essential skills that should be acquired from coaching training. Some participants reported that developing self-awareness may assist the coach in becoming more aware of their developmental areas and maintaining an objective view during a coaching session. Furthermore, the participants mentioned that EQ techniques such as mindfulness, and understanding one's identity, motivation, personality, and strengths are critical skills for IOPs obtained through training. The participants referred to interpersonal skills such as deep listening, insightful and reflective questioning, and asking for feedback as important skills to obtain further training. Other participants emphasised that gaining confidence as a coach is a critical skill that needs to be further developed:

'… I would also like to acquire the skills of confidence and I believe that will only develop with experience.' (Male, 41 years old, Lecturer, Frequency of coaching: bimonthly)

Some other participants, as seen in the excerpts further in the text, also referred to listening, questioning, interviewing ability, and probing for feedback as necessary facilitation skills that they would like to acquire through training:

'Holistic overview of the situation, listening and questioning skills and reflective listening.' (Female, 25 years old, Intern, Frequency of coaching: informally)

'… [W]ill still continue to ask for feedback on skills that I think I am good at as to avoid stagnation in my overall development as well …'. (Female, 44 years old, Intern, Frequency of coaching: rarely)

Adding to facilitation skills, the process management subtheme highlights the participants' recognition of the various layers inherent in managing the coaching process. This includes improving non-verbal communication and mastering skilful questioning. The participants' perspectives within this theme mirror the facilitation skills needed to create an environment conducive to productive coaching conversations, as stated by Participants 10 and Participant 16:

'… I also need to gain more confidence in facilitating a session, listening, identifying, and picking up on cues especially through non-verbal communication.' (Female, 32 years old, Intern, Frequency of coaching: weekly)

'I think I sometimes struggle with getting my thoughts across verbally and asking the right questions …'. (Female, 45 years old, Lecturer, Frequency of coaching: monthly)

One participant highlighted the importance of cultivating the skill to manage change, particularly given the myriad changes that COVID-19 has introduced to individuals' lives and work environments, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

'… COVID-19 has underscored the necessity of being prepared for change.' (Female, 44 years old, Intern, Frequency of coaching: rarely)

Most participants stated their need for theoretical competence regarding acquiring and applying theoretical coaching knowledge. These two aspects of intellectual competence were deemed essential coaching skills to develop. Some participants highlighted their need to broaden their theoretical foundation of workplace psychopathology and apply diverse coaching techniques and models. For instance, Participant 6's expressed need for an improved understanding of sound coaching models underscores the participants' need for a robust theoretical framework:

'I would like to have a broader understanding of different coaching approaches/models …'. (Male, 41 years old, Lecturer, Frequency of coaching: bimonthly)

Other participants stated that they would like to acquire skills that would assist them in applying their theoretical coaching knowledge. These skills include identifying processes and analysing situations or data to provide effective coaching services. Furthermore, the theme touches upon integrating technology (technological skills) into coaching practices. One participant explicitly referred to the necessity of upskilling technological proficiency:

'Technological-mediated coaching platforms.' (Female, 38 years old, Coach, Frequency of coaching: weekly)

Another participant mentioned that developing practice management skills is another vital component that needs to be addressed during coaching training, such as the ability to plan, organise, and oversee tasks and manage resources, as can be seen in this quotation:

'I would like to increase my organising and administrative skills.' (Female, 25 years old, Intern, Frequency of coaching: informally)

Following the earlier reflections on the participant's training needs to equip IOPs as coaches, the researcher illustrated their conceptualisation of category 3 as training needs in coaching skills of IOPs, in Figure 3.

Following the researchers' conceptualising of the themes and sub-themes that emerged in three categories regarding the participants' impressions of functioning as people developers in the capacity of coaches, an outlined discussion to elucidate the findings ensues.

## Outlined discussion of the findings

The findings generally explored how the IOPs viewed themselves as coaches and how they perceived their competence in coaching, ranging between feeling confident and inexperienced. The findings showed that the participants felt they needed more development in the field of coaching, with specific development needs identified.

The *first research question* of this research study was to explore what the impressions of IOPs are regarding their competence as coaches. The participants reported their impression of coaching as a facilitation process, a multi-dimensional process, and a process of equipping clients. Grant (2011) refers to coaching as a human change facilitation process, confirming that the participants have a good idea of what the coaching process entails. The present study's findings highlight the necessity for a clarified differentiation between counselling and coaching practices among IOPs. This need for distinct boundaries is a recurring theme in the academic literature. Wrogeman et al. (2023) suggest that blurred lines between counselling and coaching warrant a renegotiation of the client engagement terms, either through referring the client to psychotherapy or redefining the scope of the IOPs' role as coach. Additionally, the participants reported instances where they found themselves identifying psychopathology and providing trauma counselling to clients. This further complicates the role definition between coaching and counselling. Grant (2011) noted that the solution-focused or strengths-based approach originated within the counselling field and has also been adopted in the coaching domain. This cross-utilisation of methods makes it crucial for practitioners to have a nuanced understanding of their roles in counselling and coaching contexts. It is noteworthy that Form 218, as outlined by the HPCSA (2019), provides specific guidelines distinguishing between various sub-fields of industrial psychology, categorising coaching and counselling under different sub-sections – Professional Development Activities and Research for coaching, and Career Psychology and Employee Wellness and Wellbeing for counselling. This classification further corroborates the need for IOP practitioners to be well-versed in the appropriate protocols for each practice. Odendaal and Le Roux (2016) have emphasised that IOP practitioners frequently find themselves in situations where knowledge related to coaching psychology is applicable. Therefore, it becomes imperative for IOP practitioners to be educated and trained in recognising the distinctions and interconnections between coaching and counselling roles, particularly in terms of appropriate referral and contract renegotiation procedures when the boundaries between the two become ambiguous.

Another coaching process described by the participants was equipping coachees to develop themselves on a personal and comprehensive level. The International Coaching Federation (ICF, 2023) maintain that coaching aims to maximise a client's personal and professional potential. There seems to be a link between personal mastery and leadership development, which in essence, is a personal development process whereby the coach equips clients or coachees to reach their desired goals (Askey, 2020). The results showed that some of the participants felt confident as coaches as they reported on their certainty of coaching psychology theories and enjoying being a lifelong learner. Lifelong learning is a term often referred to in literature and describes an individual's desire to educate oneself continuously or to receive training in response to adapting to the changes in life and work (Love, 2011). This might be one of the contributing reasons why some of the participants felt confident as coaches as they invested in their professional identity as lifelong learners. The participants also reported that they remained self-aware of their strengths and competencies, providing them with the necessary confidence to conduct coaching sessions. Self-awareness is a key aspect of IOPs development as coaches and in establishing effective coaching relationships with their coachees (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010).

Some of the participants reported that they were experienced coaches as they followed established or personalised approaches to lead coaching processes, while others felt inexperienced in the field of coaching. These participants attributed their reality of being inexperienced coaches to the absence of an appropriate mentor and their struggle to draw coaching boundaries during sessions. Form 218 (HPCSA, 2019) states that a supervisor should take on the role of a mentor and coach. In the case where IOP interns have an experienced mentor and coach who supervises their internship with the necessary care as prescribed by the HPCSA (2019), there should be no gap left open for IOP practitioners to feel that they are ill-equipped and have not received the necessary mentorship or coaching to develop into good coaches themselves.

The *second research question* of the study was to explore what the IOPs' training needs are in order to equip them as coaches. The participants reported a need for further development and also to gain a greater understanding of the IOP practitioner's scope of the coaching profession. Furthermore, specific coaching skills that need to be addressed through training were also identified in the findings. Regarding emotional intelligence, the participants reported a variety of skills they would like to acquire, such as coping with change, and applying personal boundaries. Enhancing IOP coaches' soft skills, like emotional intelligence (EI), may significantly

impact their coaching efforts as it assists people in making good decisions and solving problems (Bar-On, 2004). Justice (2010) refers to interpersonal skills as consisting of three aspects: social awareness, empathy, and relationship management. All of these are critical skills to keep the coaching relationship effective and engaging for the coachee.

The findings showed that the participants indicated that coping with change is an important skill to be developed. Brandes and Lai (2022) argue that change experts such as coaches should be competent in identifying different emotional and behavioural indicators of resistance to change in the people or employees whom they coach. Technology is rapidly and constantly changing the business landscape, making organisational change inevitable. At the fast pace of change in the workplace, employees are expected to demonstrate unique resistance reactions to change. Industrial and organisational psychologist practitioners are considered to be change-management experts (Van Zyl et al., 2016) and would need to review the effectiveness of their change-management strategies in order to efficiently act as a change expert in their coaching role (Brandes & Lai, 2022). Coaching is seen as a facilitation opportunity to align individuals or employees with organisational change and demands (Rosha & Lace, 2016). It is therefore vital for IOP practitioners to ensure that they acquire the competency and remain upskilled in facilitating change through individual interventions such as coaching. Many researchers have explored online coaching over the last two decades as online technology emerged; however, the outbreak of COVID-19 has fast-tracked the adoption of online coaching practices. According to Van Coller-Peter and Manzini (2020), coaches and clients prefer online coaching to in-person coaching as more people embrace technology-enabled environments. McKinsey and Company (2021) propose 11 foundational elements of digital talents that individuals should develop to secure future jobs, including digital literacy. Digital literacy is therefore a skill that applies to clients and coaches as they need to remain skilled at facilitating seamless online coaching sessions and experiences.

Furthermore, the participants also reported a need for specific skills related to intellectual competence, including acquiring and applying theoretical knowledge. The Department of Health (2010) specifically states that IOP practitioners should be knowledgeable in 'applying paradigms, theories, models, constructs, and principles of psychology' to improve, among others, individual behaviour effectively (p. 9). This means that the IOP coach has access to an extensive field of evidence-based scientific research on coaching psychology and other areas of psychology. The findings further revealed a need for specific skills to identify processes and analyse situations to provide effective coaching services. This ability is specifically relevant for IOPs as they should incorporate the principles of psychology into the consulting processes imperative when executing interventions in a business environment involving individuals, groups, or organisations (HPCSA, 2019).

Lastly, the results showed a need to be well-equipped in administrative and organisation skills. Strong administrative and organisational skills are crucial for psychologists to ensure that they provide effective services to their clients and meet professional and ethical standards (Department of Health, 2006).

The findings of this study hold the potential to increase awareness among IOP practitioners on their role as people developers, specifically as coaches. The findings indicate that many IOP practitioners are still hesitant or experience a lack of knowledge or experience to apply effective coaching practices. Another important practical implication of this research study is to increase awareness of coaching training tools for IOP practitioners. Tertiary institutions like universities should include multiple facets of coaching based on a sound coaching psychology framework in their curriculums, preferably differentiating between coaching and counselling.

## Limitations and recommendations

This research study had certain limitations that are important to note for the reader and future researchers. Firstly, the study's sample size consisted of seventeen ($N = 17$) participants. Although the data size was adequate for a qualitative study, the findings regarding the South African context could not be generalised. Recommendations for future research include a larger sample size during the data-collection phase to provide a more diverse and broader perspective of industrial psychology professionals as coaches. Secondly, future researchers could consider conducting focus groups as an additional source of data collection as this could potentially provide valuable additional findings to the study.

Another limitation was the lack of diversity among the participants as the majority were Afrikaans speaking (70.59%), which is not an accurate demographic representation of industrial psychology professionals in the country. Another potential limitation of this study is the possibility that the interview questions were phrased in a leading manner. Leading questions can inadvertently guide respondents towards particular answers, limiting the validity of the data gathered. For more accurate and unbiased user insights, future practices could involve employing open-ended questions designed to elicit descriptive responses. Our study could have benefited from following specific guidelines (Schade, 2017) to minimise this limitation, such as utilising a neutral language to reduce the risk of influencing participant answers, refraining from specifically naming interface elements, which could guide user interaction, or making assumptions about participants' thoughts or feelings to allow for more genuine responses. By not strictly adhering to these guidelines, we acknowledge that the study may have missed the opportunity to obtain more authentic and insightful feedback. Future research should consider these factors to comprehensively understand participant behaviour.

# Conclusion

Coaching is a multifaceted profession that shares similarities with counselling, making distinguishing between the two practices challenging for IOP practitioners. Coaching has the potential to facilitate personal and professional growth, leading to increased productivity and organisational goal attainment, making it an ideal skill for the IOP practitioner. It is important to stay updated on the latest research and best practices in coaching psychology theories and be rooted in relevant psychological theories. It is therefore the IOP coach's responsibility to upskill their theoretical knowledge on a constant basis to be able to apply effective coaching services in practice. In order for the IOP coach to effectively fulfil their roles and functions as a people developer, it is crucial to address their specific skill development and training needs to promote growth and success.

## Disclaimer

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