# A LARGE-SCALE STUDY OF EXECUTIVE AND WORKPLACE COACHING: THE RELATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF RELATIONSHIP, PERSONALITY MATCH, AND SELF-EFFICACY

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This large-scale study of executive coaching explores the perceived effectiveness of coaching from the perspectives of coach, coachee, and sponsor, and potential active ingredients including the coach–coachee working alliance, coachee self-efficacy, personality, and "personality match" between coach and coachee. Using a retrospective design, data was collected from 1,895 client–coach pairs (366 different coaches) from 34 countries, and 92 sponsors, for a total of 3,882 matching surveys. Results indicate that coachee perceptions of coaching effectiveness (CE) were significantly related to both coach- and coachee-rated strength of the working alliance and to coachee self-efficacy but unrelated to coachee or coach personality and to personality matching. The coachee–coach working alliance mediated the impact of self-efficacy on CE, suggesting that the strength of this working alliance—particularly as seen through the eyes of the coachee—is a key ingredient in CE. In addition, a strong emphasis on

goals in the working alliance can partially compensate for low coachee self-efficacy. The task and goal aspects of the working alliance were stronger predictors of positive CE than the bond aspects, highlighting the importance of a task and goal focus in the coach–coachee relationship.

*Keywords:* executive coaching, coaching effectiveness, client–coach relationship, active ingredients, self-efficacy

There is now a consistent body of research that demonstrates the efficacy of coaching (for a recent review and meta-analysis of workplace coaching see Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2015), and government guidelines for the practice of organizational coaching have been developed in a number of countries worldwide (e.g., Standards Australia, 2011). As the evidence base for the efficacy of coaching has matured, the attention of some researchers has turned to the so-called "active ingredients" of successful coaching—in particular the nature of the coach–coachee relationship and its impact on coaching effectiveness (McKenna & Davis, 2009). Although the working alliance has been comprehensively researched in the psychotherapeutic spheres, exploration of the coach–coachee working alliance represents a new phase in coaching research. This new line of coach-specific research has the potential to enhance our understanding of the fundamentals of effective coaching and give us insight into how to better facilitate the process of change and goal attainment.

This paper aims to contribute to this emerging knowledge base by presenting data from a large-scale international coaching research study involving 1,895 coach–coachee pairs (366 different coaches) from 34 countries, and 92 organizational "sponsors" of the coaching, with a total of 3,882 completed surveys. The main focus of this paper is on the roles of the coach–coachee working alliance, personality, and self-efficacy in relation to coaching effectiveness. Although these variables are hypothesized to play an important part in coaching effectiveness, to date there have been no large-scale coaching studies to explore this issue. The present study is the first to explore this issue using a highly diverse large-scale sample of coaches and coachees.

## Common Factors in the Therapeutic Relationship

A long-standing debate within the psychotherapeutic domain has focused on the relative efficacy of different psychotherapeutic approaches. Originally this debate was seen as a contest between the psychodynamic therapies (Freud, 1920; Jung, 1964) and behavioral therapy (Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966) or the cognitive-behaviorists (Beck, 1995). However, despite heated and often acerbic disputes between the supporters of different theoretical approaches as to which was the "best," there has been little difference found among different types of empirically supported treatments in terms of effectiveness or outcomes (Norcross & Newman, 1992). The phrase *common factors* hence stems from the idea that, if all empirically supported therapies are equally effective, there may well be a set of general active ingredients that are common to all (Rosenzweig, 1936).

There has been a considerable amount of research into common factors in therapy. A search of PsycINFO in April 2015 using the words *common factors* found a total of 1,578 citations. The importance of common factors within the therapeutic relationship is well documented. For example, Wampold et al. (1997) emphasized the role of relationship characteristics such as empathy, unconditional positive regard, trust, respect, and support and argued that these are the essential components of an effective working alliance in facilitating therapeutic change. Horvath and Symonds (1991), in a meta-analysis of 24 studies, found that the strength of the working alliance was predictive of treatment outcomes. More recent research has upheld the notion that the therapeutic working alliance is important in predicting outcome in patients with a range of sociopsychological problems including eating disorders (Zaitsoff, Pullmer, Cyr, & Aime, 2015) and social anxiety (Ngai, Tully, & Anderson, 2015). In short, a significant body of research indicates that one of the most important factors in psychotherapeutic outcomes is the ability of the therapist to

develop a strong working alliance with the client that embodies trust, warmth, and respect for the client's autonomy (Lampropoulos, 2000).

Although coaching is not therapy, there are some similarities, particularly where workplace or executive coaching focuses on professional or personal development in areas such as emotional competencies or dealing with conflict. From this perspective both coaching and psychotherapy belong to a general class of helping relationship (see de Haan, 2008, for discussion on similarities and differences between executive coaching and therapy).

It is not surprising then that this stream of psychotherapeutic research has influenced the direction of some research in the coaching domain (McKenna & Davis, 2009). This new coaching research takes as its key focus the nature of the relationship between the coachee and the coach. It turns the focus away from an evaluation of coaching effectiveness per se and seeks to identify the factors associated with the coaching relationship that contribute most significantly to coaching effectiveness (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013).

## Overview of Coaching Research into the Coach–Coachee Relationship

A search of the coaching literature in April 2015 found nine studies that explored the question of which variables within the coaching relationship had impact on coaching effectiveness.

Scoular and Linley (2006) looked at how both (a) explicit goal-setting at the beginning of the coaching conversation and (b) personality (dis-)similarities between coach and coachee in terms of Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI; Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998) affected perceived effectiveness. The sample included 117 clients and 14 experienced coaches, and the coaching consisted of 30-min "one-off" sessions. No difference resulted for outcome measurements at 2 and 8 weeks after the session between "goal-setting" and "no goal-setting"; but when the coach and coachee differed more on aspects of their MBTI profiles, the outcome scores were significantly higher.

Stewart, Palmer, Wilkin, and Kerrin (2008) looked at how both coachee personality and coachee self-efficacy predicted coaching effectiveness. They measured the Big Five personality traits (Digman, 1990) and general self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) for 110 coachees (after an average of seven sessions with mostly an experienced external coach) and correlated these with coaching effectiveness. They found moderate positive effects for Conscientiousness, Openness, Emotional Stability, and general self-efficacy but cautioned that other factors are likely to play a role as well.

Boyce, Jackson, and Neal (2010) studied 74 coach–coachee relationships with an average of eight sessions and "leader coaches" of "various levels of training" within a U.S. military academy where the coachees were cadets and the coaches were senior military leaders who had had some training in executive coaching. The study analyzed the impact of the coach–coachee relationship (in terms of rapport, trust, and commitment) and matching criteria (demographic commonality, behavioral compatibility, and coach credibility) on coaching effectiveness. Their main findings were that matching was not related to outcome although outcome was significantly related to the relationship as assessed by both the coach and the coachee. The coachee ratings were more highly related to outcome than the coach ratings (explained proportion of variance around 50% vs. around 25%). Moreover, the coachee ratings fully mediated the other dependencies, suggesting that variables such as credibility and compatibility positively impact coaching effectiveness through supporting the development of the coaching relationship.

Baron and Morin (2009, 2012) studied 31 internal coach–coachee pairs involved in on average five sessions as part of a leadership-development program at a manufacturing company with leader-coaches having had 2 days of coaching-related training. They showed that the coaching relationship, as measured by coachee's ratings of the Working Alliance Inventory (Horvath & Greenberg, 1986), predicted coaching effectiveness in terms of changes in coachee self-efficacy (with explained proportion of variance around 25%). However, coaches' ratings of the working alliance did not predict this outcome significantly.

de Haan, Culpin, and Curd (2011) examined how various executive coaching interventions (at least four sessions each with professional external coaches) make a difference to coachees. Seventy-one coachees, from as many organizations, reported on the various coaching interventions, and these ratings were compared with their ratings of the effectiveness of the conversations. There were no effects for specific coach interventions, leading to the conclusion that coaching effectiveness is not a function of specific techniques or interventions as much as effectiveness is a function of factors common to all coaching, such as the quality of the coaching relationship, empathic understanding, positive expectations, and so forth.

Smith and Brummel (2013) explored the relationship between three of the four active ingredients of therapy (therapeutic relationship; expectancy, hope, and placebo effects; and theory and technique) and a specific measure of executive coaching success—change in leadership competencies—that were in themselves the focus of the coaching engagement (30 clients who spent on average 82 hours being coached by external coaches or doing their "coaching homework"). The results indicated that these three active ingredients were significantly related to coaching success. It is of note that Smith and Brummel (2013) also found that those coachees who set developmental plans (a technique frequently used in coaching engagements) were statistically more likely to experience competency improvement compared to those who did not create developmental plans. Given the findings in the goal-theory literature that creating goals and action plans improves performance and facilitates goal attainment (Gollwitzer, 1999), Smith and Brummel (2013) concluded that goal theory has much to offer in augmenting our understanding of what constitutes an effective coach–coachee relationship.

de Haan et al. (2013) built on de Haan et al.'s (2011) study to research the relative impact and importance of various common factors in executive coaching for 156 coachees and 34 experienced external coaches (an average of eight coaching sessions). The purpose of this research was to look at various "common factors" and to measure which of these are likely to have the highest positive impact on coachees. The study showed that coachee perceptions of the outcome of coaching were significantly related to their perceptions of the working alliance, coachee self-efficacy and perceptions of coaching interventions ("generalized techniques") of the coach. Coach and coachee personality differences or matching in terms of MBTI showed no significant correlation with effectiveness. The coach–coachee working alliance explained 25% of the variance and strongly mediated the impact of self-efficacy and the majority of techniques on coaching effectiveness (except for perceived explicit focus on goals and helping the coachee to make discoveries), suggesting again that the relationship is the key factor in coaching effectiveness.

Grant (2014a) compared four aspects of the coach–coachee relationship to investigate which was more related to specific measures of coaching success. The four aspects were (a) autonomy support (bonding); (b) the extent to which a coachee feels satisfied with the actual coach–coachee relationship; (c) the extent to which the coaching relationship was similar to an "ideal" coach–coachee relationship; and (d) a goal-focused coach–coachee relationship. In a within-subject study, 49 coach–coachee dyads conducted four coaching sessions over a 10- to 12-week period (as part of a 5-day coach training program). Results indicate that satisfaction with a coach–coachee relationship does not predict successful coaching effectiveness ($r = .25$; ns); autonomy support ($r = .29$; $p < .05$) and proximity to an "ideal" relationship ($r = .30$; $p = .05$); moderately predicted coaching success; and a goal-focused coach–coachee relationship was a more powerful predictor of coaching success ($r = .43$; $p < .01$). The findings affirm the importance of goals in the coaching process.

Gessnitzer and Kauffeld (2015) analyzed the working relationship of 31 videotaped coaching dyads by means of interaction analysis and questionnaires. They found that coachee-initiated goals and tasks were positively related to coaching success. However, coach-initiated goals and tasks had the opposite effect. They also found that bonding behaviors did not influence coaching success.

## Major Limitations of Past Research

One limitation of much of the past coaching research into the coach–coachee relationship relates to sample sizes and their homogenous nature. Even though similar effects have been found for both

experienced and inexperienced coach samples, much of the past work has involved relatively small sample sizes, and the coachees in each study have tended to be drawn from the same population and have tended to be coached using broadly similar approaches within each study. In addition, different studies have used different measures of the coach–coachee relationship.

Although this might tell us useful information about the role of the coach–coachee relationship within each individual study, it tells us less about the role of the coach–coachee relationship in general, or within the broader coaching-industry context. What is needed to explore this issue in more depth is a large-scale study that draws on a broad range of coachee populations, that includes a variety of coaches who are employing a number of coaching methodologies, and that uses one measure of the coach–coachee relationship.

## Present Study

The present study examines the relative impact of various common factors for the largest hetero-geneous coaching sample to date: 1,895 coachees who were receiving executive coaching and their executive coaches, together with 92 organizational "sponsors" such as the coachee's manager or HR director.

### Working Alliance

One purpose of this research was to study elements common to all coaching approaches (i.e., common factors) that are likely to be active ingredients of coaching. We based our predictions about the impact of common factors on findings from the coaching studies reviewed above, which are broadly in alignment with psychotherapy outcome studies and suggest that common factors are likely to have a positive impact on coaching effectiveness. The most consistent effect among the common factors studied in earlier research has been for the strength of the coach–client relationship, or the working alliance (see, e.g., Baron & Morin, 2009, and de Haan et al., 2013).

> *Hypothesis 1:* The strength of the coaching working alliance will predict coaching effective-ness (CE), (a) as measured by the coachee, (b) as measured by the coach, and (c) as measured by the sponsor.

### General Self-Efficacy

General self-efficacy is the belief in one's competence to cope with a broad range of stressful or challenging demands (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005) and has been found to be a valid construct in a broad range of ethnic and cultural settings globally (Luszczynska et al., 2005; Schwarzer, Bäßler, Kwiatek, Schröder, & Zhang, 1997). Thus general self-efficacy may be an important variable that may mediate the effect of the coach–coachee relationship on CE. Research by Anderson and Betz (2001) showed that a person's self-efficacy expectations have a direct bearing on his or her personal and career development. Sherer et al. (1982) found that personal self-efficacy expectations are often regarded as primary determinants of behavioral change. Within the coaching outcome literature, Stewart et al. (2008) and de Haan et al. (2013) have shown that general self-efficacy predicts coaching effectiveness, while Evers, Brouwers, and Tomic (2006) found that coaching enhanced self-efficacy. Grant (2014b) demonstrated that executive coaching during a period of organizational change increased leadership self-efficacy. Hence, a coachee's general self-efficacy ratings can be expected to predict his or her own coaching outcomes. Conversely, a coach's general self-efficacy ratings should predict his or her own ratings of coaching effectiveness but not the coachee's rating of coaching effectiveness.

> *Hypothesis 2a*: General self-efficacy of the client will predict CE as scored by coach, client and sponsor.

> *Hypothesis 2b:* General self-efficacy of the coach will only predict CE as scored by coaches themselves.

## Personality Measure

Personality potentially has an important mediating role in the coach–coachee relationship, so we wanted to explore this issue in the present study. Past research (Scoular & Linley, 2006) has found that personality dissimilarity as measured by (self-reported) MBTI was related to CE. However, de Haan et al. (2013) did not find any significant correlations between personality differences or personality matching in terms of (self-reported) MBTI and CE. We acknowledge that the MBTI has only "sufficient" levels of reliability and validity and is a poor predictor of managerial effectiveness, job performance, and employee commitment (Gardner & Martinko, 1996). On the other hand, the MBTI is still one of the most frequently and internationally used psychometric instruments and has been used by previous researchers; moreover Bell (2006) has shown that although the MBTI did not correlate with actual CE, a sample of 67 coachees varied significantly across their MBTI types in terms of their perceptions of CE. Because we expect to find zero effect for different coach and coachee personalities in terms of their MBTI profiles (as in de Haan et al., 2013), we feel justified in this case to put forward the null hypothesis.

> *Hypothesis 3:* Coach-coachee personality dissimilarity and matching (as characterized by the MBTI profile) will not predict CE or the strength of coaching relationships.

## Mediation

As previously argued, we posit that the coachee's perception of the coach–coachee relationship may be a fundamental active ingredient in CE and a determining factor of the influence of the other active ingredients. In other words, if the relationship is weak, none of the other factors can make up for it. On the other hand, if the relationship is strong, it facilitates the effects of the other factors. The results of Boyce et al. (2010) and de Haan et al. (2013) indeed have shown that in their data the strength of the coaching relationship as seen by the coachee mediated the significant effects found for other variables.

> *Hypothesis 4:* The strength of the coaching working alliance will mediate the effects of coachee's general self-efficacy on CE.
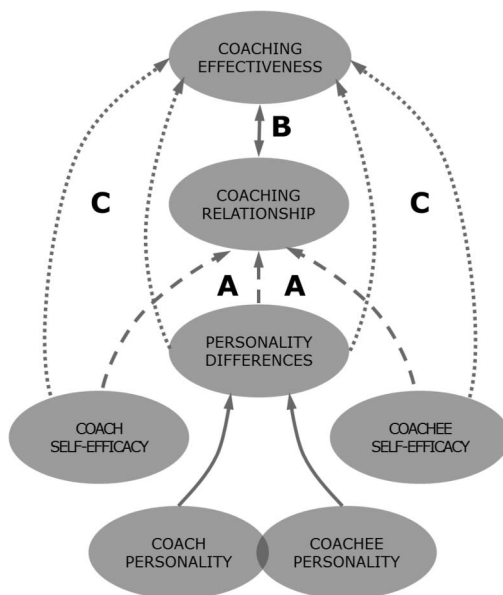
Figure 1 shows the various common factors hypothesized to have a positive impact on the outcomes of coaching. This figure also demonstrates how the impact of these common factors may be mediated through the relationship, as predicted by Hypothesis 4.

## Method

### Sample Recruitment Process

The participating coach–coachee pairs were selected through our own networks of experienced and qualified executive coaches. We made clear that we were primarily interested in executive coaches but we did not exclude other coaches from our sample. The coaches were employed by or associated with different institutions, such as Ashridge Business School, the Society for Coaching Psychology in Italy, the Dutch Association for Coaching and Supervision, Intercoach, and the Oxford School for Coaching and Mentoring, among others. A snowball sampling technique was used, as follows. Each coach completed an online "coach survey" and then invited clients to complete an online "client survey." Clients nominated an organizational sponsor, who was invited by us to complete the equivalent "sponsor survey" where appropriate.

From an initial dataset of 4,070 coach and coachee questionnaires, 3,790 matching coach and coachee questionnaires could be identified, so it was possible to study a total of 1,895 coaching relationships. The exact number of coaching relationships included in each analysis varies according to coach and coachee completion rates. It was not possible to ensure the full completion of all scales or prevent the possibility of errors and missing data and thus the sample size reported differs

*Figure 1.* Graphical depiction of the various common factors studied as independent variables. In our analysis we investigated both direct influences of the independent variables on CE (dependencies B and C) and the probability of mediation of this influence through the strongest dependency, the coaching relationship (dependency A plus B as compared to C).

according to the scale being analyzed. Data collection took place over an 18-month period from November 2011 to May 2013.

## Coach Details

Of a total of 366 coaches from 22 different countries with an average experience of 13.3 years ($SD = 7.2$) and a minimum experience of less than 1 year and a maximum of 43 years, 118 were male and 226 female (22 did not report gender). The majority of coaches were external coaches (308 external; 56 internal; 2 not reported) and worked as executive, business, or career coaches (158 executive/business coaches; 86 career coaches; 61 life coaches; 15 counselors; 45 others; 1 not reported). The majority of coaches were undertaking stand-alone coaching assignments ($n = 248$) rather than coaching as part of a team- or organizational-development intervention ($n = 30$), a leadership-development program ($n = 55$), or other coaching assignment ($n = 28$), with $n = 5$ not reported.

## Coachee Details

There were 875 male and 918 female coachees (99 did not indicate gender). The number of sessions that coach and coachee had undertaken at the point that data was collected ranged from one to more than 40, with an average of eight, a median of seven, and four to six coaching sessions being the modal group ($n = 733$) and 4 to 6 months the modal relationship length ($n = 554$). Coachees were being coached on a broad range of issues from basic management and workplace skills to complex issues related to personal and leadership development. Thus the coachee sample was heterogeneous in terms of goals for coaching, and we know from speaking with some of the participating coaches that there were "remedial" as well as "developmental" assignments in the sample. The heterogeneous nature of this sample reflects the aim of this study to test our hypotheses using a sample that accurately represented the highly diverse nature of coaching engagements in the real world.

## Coaching Sponsor Details

There were 92 organizational sponsors in the sample with a relatively even gender split of 43 males and 49 females.

## Measures

All coach and coachee surveys could be completed in 10 min. The coach surveys collected relevant background information on gender, MBTI type, coaching credentials, and self-efficacy. For every assignment, the coaches answered questions about the type of coaching and the context of coaching (e.g., stand-alone or part of leadership development). The coachee survey asked for name, gender, MBTI type, nationality, professional role, and for permission to contact a "manager," "HR director," or "business partner" who had sponsored the coaching work.

For the remainder of the questionnaires, the coach and coachee questionnaires were identical and included number of sessions to date, months of coaching to date, own initial expectations, and the coach/coachee's initial expectations of outcomes.

**CE.** CE was assessed using four items on a 7-point response scale: (a) "successful in creating reflective space"; (b) "successful in creating new insights"; (c) "successfully engaged in new action or behavior"; and (d) "overall coaching outcome." Responses were calculated as the averaged score across these four items.

**Coach–coachee relationship.** The Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) was used as a measure of the strength of the coach–coachee relationship (Horvath & Greenberg, 1986). Prior permission was obtained to adapt this 36-item instrument, which is used widely in therapy for measuring the strength and quality of the relationship between therapist and client, in order to measure the coach–coachee relationship. The WAI consists of three subscales: Task, Goal, and Bond.

The term *Task* refers to what coach and coachee agree need to be done in order for the coachee to reach his or her goals for coaching. A typical item is, "I am clear as to what my coach wants me to do in these sessions."

The term *Goal* refers to the outcomes that the coach/coachee hopes to gain from coaching. A typical item is, "The goals of these sessions are important to me."

The term *Bond* refers to what extent the coach/coachee trusts, respects, and feels confidence in the other person. A typical item is, "I believe my coach is genuinely concerned for my welfare."

**General self-efficacy.** The General Self-Efficacy scale was used to assess the coach/coachee self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jeruzalem, 1995). This scale consists of 10 items on a 4-point Likert scale. Sample items include: "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough," "If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want," and "It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals."

**Sponsor questionnaire.** The sponsor questionnaire contained only the questions about initial expectations (for themselves and their colleagues) and the questions about effectiveness.

Reliability estimates were calculated for all of the scales (see Table 1) and ranged from adequate to (mostly) high.

## Data Preanalysis Checks

We conducted preanalysis checks to test for the influence of coach and coachee characteristics and other dimensions of the coaching relationship on CE in order to eliminate the possibility of confounding variables. We tested for the effect of the length of the coaching relationship and number of coaching sessions, the type of coaching, and coach and client gender. There were few significant differences. As we expected, CE, working alliance ("Bond"), and self-efficacy all increase with the length of the coaching relationship ($p < .01$), and data from different types of coaching (executive coaching, career coaching, external, internal, as part of a leadership program, etc.) did not behave differently, so pulling together all this data for the main analysis was warranted. Moreover, we are confident that the career counselors, life coaches, and psychological counselors that contributed to this study were indeed submitting only clients of work-based helping conver-

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics, Reliability Estimates, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables*

| Variable | Items | N | M | SD | Range | | | | | | r | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 1. Coach perceived CE | 4 | 1894 | 24.40 | 3.51 | 4–28 | .91 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Coach WAI–task | 12 | 1892 | 72.35 | 7.23 | 27–84 | .56** | .83 | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Coach WAI–bond | 12 | 1892 | 72.92 | 6.86 | 19–84 | .43** | .65** | .66 | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Coach WAI–goal | 12 | 1892 | 70.82 | 8.07 | 26–84 | .56** | .82** | .63** | .84 | | | | | | | |
| 5. Coach self-efficacy | 10 | 1627 | 33.37 | 3.41 | 23–40 | .12** | .21** | .12** | .17** | .79 | | | | | | |
| 6. Coachee perceived CE | 4 | 1777 | 24.31 | 3.33 | 4–28 | .22** | .18** | .15** | .19** | .01 | .90 | | | | | |
| 7. Coachee WAI–task | 12 | 1758 | 72.30 | 7.84 | 11–84 | .21** | .19** | .16** | .20** | .02 | .55** | .82 | | | | |
| 8. Coachee WAI–bond | 12 | 1758 | 73.11 | 7.65 | 9–84 | .16** | .13** | .16** | .15** | <.01 | .46** | .68** | .78 | | | |
| 9. Coachee WAI–goal | 12 | 1758 | 73.11 | 7.65 | 12–84 | .23** | .20** | .17** | .21** | .03 | .56** | .81** | .68** | .84 | | |
| 10. Coachee self-efficacy | 10 | 1722 | 32.06 | 3.86 | 10–40 | .09** | .06* | .07* | .04 | .03 | .24** | .24** | .20** | .27** | .85 | |
| 11. Sponsor perceived effectiveness | 4 | 92 | 23.36 | 2.53 | 17–28 | −.04 | −.09 | −.08 | −.004 | .13 | .14 | .07 | .18 | .06 | .02 | .75 |

*Note.* Cronbach alphas of every multi-item variable are on the diagonal in the intercorrelations section of the table. CE = Coaching effectiveness; WAI = Working Alliance Inventory.

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .004$.

sations, conversations that they would call *workplace* or *executive coaching*, because of the way we recruited subjects for the research.

There were some small significant patterns in the coach group: (a) External coaches self-reported higher CE than internal coaches, $p < .01$; (b) similarly, coaches working on a leadership program self-reported higher CE as compared to others; (c) executive or business coaches self-reported a higher Bond in the working alliances with their clients. The only noteworthy effect was better CE for female coaches as compared to male coaches, as reported by coachees: $t(1709) = 1.96$, $p = .05$. Moreover, coachee-reported working alliances for female coaches are also higher across Task, $t(1688) = 2.31$, $p = .02$; Bond, $t(1688) = 2.72$, $p = .007$; and Goal $t(1688) = 2.09$, $p = .04$. Despite the statistical significance of these differences, the magnitude of the effects was small according to Cohen's *d* conventions ($d = .12; .14; .10; .09$, respectively; Cohen, 1988) and therefore coach gender was not controlled for in the main analysis.

The main dependent variable was "coaching effectiveness" (CE; the average of the four different outcome items), and the independent variables were the working alliance (as assessed by coach and coachee independently), the 16 different Myers-Briggs "types" of coach and coachee, and the self-efficacy of the coachee. All scale scores were computed as the sum of all item responses. Descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and intercorrelations are reported in Table 1. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for coach and coachee MBTI scores. Please note that, as in other studies, there is a strong bias of the clients, who are mostly managers, toward "NT" (e.g., self-selection ratios for INTP and ENTJ larger than 5, meaning these are 5 times more prevalent than in the general population, replicating Carr, Curd, Dent, Davda, & Piper, 2011) and a bias of coaches toward "NFP" (e.g., self-selection ratios for INFP and ENFP larger than 4, replicating Passmore, Holloway, & Rawle-Cope, 2010).

## Results and Preliminary Discussion

### Overview of Analysis Process

The model specified in Figure 1 was tested separately for coaches and coachees in two multiple regression models with mediation analyses. Ideally, we would have tested the models in one overarching model through the use of structural equation modeling; however, given the degree of uncertainty surrounding the precise nature of the relationships coupled with the changing sample size for different variables, we were forced to analyze these data using several bivariate correlations and regression. We acknowledge that proceeding in this way inflates the probability of the Type I error rate, and thus in order to compensate for this we use a Bonferroni-corrected significance level of .01 to assess the significance of results. As shown in Table 1, all but two of the significant correlations remained significant at this more stringent alpha level.

### Hypothesis 1. the Strength of the Working Alliance Will Predict CE

Regarding Hypothesis 1, we found there was a positive correlation, $r = .58$ ($n = 1,891$, $p < .01$), between the coaches' experienced overall working alliance and CE as measured by the coach, and similar correlations for the three working alliance subscales (Task $r = .56$, $n = 1,891$, $p < .01$; Bond $r = .43$, $n = 1,891$, $p < .01$; Goal $r = .56$, $n = 1,891$, $p < .01$). Computation of Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation showed that the task and goal aspects of the working alliance were significantly stronger compared to the bond aspect ($Z = 5.31$, $p < .01$; $Z = 5.31$, $p < .01$, respectively).

There was a positive correlation, $r = .58$ ($n = 1,741$, $p < .01$), between the coachees' experienced overall working alliance and CE as measured by the coachee, and similar correlations for the three working alliance subscales (Task $r = .55$, $n = 1,741$, $p < .01$; Bond $r = .46$, $n = 1,741$, $p < .01$; Goal $r = .56$, $n = 1,741$, $p < .01$). Computation of Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation showed that the task and goal aspects of the coaching working alliance were significantly more strongly related to the effectiveness of coaching than the bond aspect was related to the effectiveness of coaching ($Z = 3.57$, $p < .01$; $Z = 4.00$, $p < .01$, respectively).

Table 2
*Coachee and Coach MBTI Preferences and Profiles*

| Personality type | Coachee | | Coach | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage |
| ENFJ | 24 | 6.5 | 69 | 10.3 |
| ENFP | 34 | 9.3 | 178 | 26.7 |
| ENTJ | 66 | 18.0 | 56 | 8.4 |
| ENTP | 35 | 9.5 | 68 | 10.2 |
| ESFJ | 17 | 4.6 | 31 | 4.6 |
| ESFP | 4 | 1.1 | 3 | .4 |
| ESTJ | 38 | 10.4 | 49 | 7.3 |
| ESTP | 15 | 4.1 | 5 | .7 |
| INFJ | 11 | 3.0 | 28 | 4.2 |
| INFP | 21 | 5.7 | 116 | 17.4 |
| INTJ | 27 | 7.4 | 17 | 2.5 |
| INTP | 14 | 3.8 | 16 | 2.4 |
| ISFJ | 13 | 3.5 | 9 | 1.3 |
| ISFP | 2 | .5 | 2 | .3 |
| ISTJ | 39 | 10.6 | 18 | 2.7 |
| ISTP | 7 | 1.9 | 2 | .3 |
| E vs I | | | | |
| E | 233 | 63.5 | 462 | 69.3 |
| I | 134 | 36.5 | 205 | 30.7 |
| S vs N | | | | |
| S | 133 | 36.2 | 117 | 17.4 |
| N | 234 | 63.8 | 550 | 82.6 |
| T vs F | | | | |
| T | 243 | 66.2 | 226 | 33.9 |
| F | 124 | 33.8 | 441 | 66.1 |
| J vs P | | | | |
| J | 232 | 63.2 | 275 | 41.2 |
| P | 135 | 36.8 | 392 | 58.8 |

*Note.* E = Extraversion; I = Introversion; S = Sensing; N = Intuition; T = Thinking; F = Feeling; J = Judging; P = Perceiving.

There was also a positive and significant correlation between the coaches' measure of the CE and the coachees' measure of CE, $r = .22$ ($n = 1,755$, $p < .01$), and working alliance for all aspects (Task, $r = .21$, $n = 1,755$, $p < .01$; Bond $r = .16$, $n = 1,755$, $p \leq .01$; Goal, $r = .23$, $n = 1,755$, $p < .01$). This is consistent with previous research by Baron and Morin (2009), Boyce et al. (2010), and de Haan et al. (2013). Computation of Fisher's $r$-to-$z$ transformation showed that the task and goal aspects of the working alliance were significantly stronger compared to the bond aspect ($Z = 3.57$, $p < .01$; $Z = 4.43$, $p < .01$, respectively).

In contrast to our expectations, we did not find significant relationships between coach or coachee ratings of CE with sponsor rating of CE ($r = -.04$, $n = 92$, $p = .72$; $r = .14$, $n = 92$, $p = .19$, respectively). The latter correlation, between coachee and sponsor ratings of effectiveness, is directionally consistent with the one between coachee and coach ratings of effectiveness (which is $r = .22$; see Table 1); however the correlations with sponsor data are not significant because of the much smaller $n$. This correlation had been significant on an earlier, partial measurement of the dataset so we would speculate that with more sponsor data it would become significant.

### Hypothesis 2. General Self-Efficacy Will Predict CE

Hypothesis 2 was supported in that (a) coachee self-efficacy was positively and significantly related to CE, $r = .24$, $n = 1,708$, $p < .01$, and the strength of the coaching working alliance, $r = .27$, $n = 1,722$, $p < .01$, as reported by the coachee and also the CE and strength of working alliance as reported by the coach ($r = .09$, $n = 1,721$, $p < .01$; $r = .06$, $n = 1,719$, $p = .01$, respectively); while (b) coach self-efficacy was positively and significantly related only to CE, $r = .12$, $n = 1,626$, $p < .01$, and working alliance, $r = .19$, $n = 1,627$, $p < .01$, as reported by coach but not coachee. Again, this aligns with results from an earlier study (de Haan et al., 2013) and in a related field: significant correlation between self-efficacy and perceived outcome in self-regulated learning (e.g., Schunk, 1990). Because of low numbers we could not establish a significant relationship between coachee self-efficacy scores and sponsor ratings of CE.

### Hypothesis 3. No Effect for Coach–Coachee Personality and Matching

Regarding Hypothesis 3, we used $t$ tests to evaluate differences in the reported CEs for each of the four MBTI coach and coachee personality dichotomies and for MBTI matches between coach and coachee. Out of 96 possible relationships only eight were significant and made intuitive sense: however they were all small effects, which confirms that personality types and matching on MBTI do not strongly interact with effectiveness or working alliance. This supports findings from de Haan et al. (2013) and differs from results reported by Scoular and Linley (2006). The latter may be due to differences in the design of the two studies: Our data was drawn from a number of longer-term coaching relationships with a large number of coaches, whereas the data from Scoular and Linley (2006) came from single 30-min sessions with only 14 coaches (Anne Scoular, personal communication, January 27, 2010).

The eight small but significant results ($p < .02$) that were found fall in three clusters, one in relation to the E/I preference, one in relation to the S/N preference, and one in relation to the T/F preference. With respect to the first, results seem to indicate that extraverted coaches and coachees achieve more agreement on tasks (and on one occasion on goals) within the working alliance, which is perhaps a consequence of interacting more. With respect to the second, coaches with an N preference may achieve slightly higher outcomes, which confirms the trends in self-selection ratios reported earlier: N preferences align with the coaching profession. And finally, with respect to the third, the F/F match seems to result in the highest bond, yet at the same time also in the lowest effectiveness. The higher bond data are understandable in terms of two "feeling" types interacting and perhaps finding more affection; and to the low effectiveness we will return in the Discussion section below.

### Hypothesis 4. Coaching Working Alliance Mediates Effects of Client General Self-Efficacy on CE

In line with the model specified in Figure 1, Hypothesis 4 predicts that the strength of the working alliance mediates significant influences of (a) coach personality, (b) coachee personality, (c) coachee self-efficacy, and (d) coach self-efficacy on CE as reported by coach and coachee. As coach–coachee personality differences did not predict CE, and separately coach and coachee personality were weak predictors of CE with only small effects, and as there was no clear pattern of effect of coach–coachee personality match/mismatch on CE, we reduced the model and used mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986) to regress self-efficacy and aspects of the working alliance (Task, Bond, Goal) on CE separately for coachee and coach both within and across the samples.

When self-efficacy and task aspects of the working alliance were regressed on coachee-rated CE, Task was significantly related to CE, $\beta = .24$, $t(1705) = 25.58$, $p < .001$, and coachee self-efficacy remained significant but was weaker, $\beta = .10$, $t(1705) = 5.52$, $p < .001$. The results of Sobel's test showed that the parameter estimate for the relationship between coachee self-efficacy and CE as reported by coachee was not significantly lower in the mediated condition, $Z = .47$, $p =$

.63, suggesting that the effect of coachee self-efficacy was not mediated by task aspects of the working alliance but instead had a direct effect.

When both self-efficacy and bond aspects of the working alliance were regressed on coachee-rated CE, Bond was significantly related to CE, $\beta = .20$, $t(1705) = 20.34$, $p < .001$, and coachee self-efficacy remained significant but was weaker, $\beta = .13$, $t(1705) = 7.05$, $p < .001$. The results of Sobel's test showed that the parameter estimate for the relationship between coachee self-efficacy and CE as reported by coachee was significantly lower in the mediated condition, $Z = 2.65$, $p < .01$, suggesting that the effect of coachee self-efficacy was partially mediated by bond aspects of the working alliance.

When both coachee self-efficacy and goal aspects of the working alliance were regressed on coachee-rated CE, Goal was significantly related to CE, $\beta = .23$, $t(1705) = 25.74$, $p < .001$, and coachee self-efficacy remained significant but was weaker, $\beta = .08$, $t(1705) = 4.77$, $p < .001$. The results of Sobel's test showed that the parameter estimate for the relationship between coachee self-efficacy and CE as reported by coachee was significantly lower in the mediated condition, $Z = 2.77$, $p < .01$, but remained significant. The effect of coachee self-efficacy was partially mediated by goal aspects of the working alliance.

When coach self-efficacy and task aspects of the working alliance were regressed on coach-rated CE, Task was significantly related to CE, $\beta = .28$, $t(1623) = 26.11$, $p < .001$, and coach self-efficacy became nonsignificant, $\beta = .001$, $t(1623) = -.03$, $p < .97$. The results of Sobel's test showed that the parameter estimate for the relationship between coach self-efficacy and CE as reported by coach was significantly lower in the mediated condition, $Z = 2.84$, $p = .004$, suggesting that the effect of coach self-efficacy was fully mediated by task aspects of the working alliance.

When coach self-efficacy and bond aspects of the working alliance were regressed on coach-rated CE, Bond was significantly related to CE, $\beta = .22$, $t(1623) = 17.90$, $p < .001$, and coach self-efficacy remained significant but was a weaker predictor, $\beta = .07$, $t(1623) = 3.00$, $p = .003$. The results of Sobel's test showed that the parameter estimate for the relationship between coach self-efficacy and CE as reported by coach was significantly lower in the mediated condition, $Z = 4.70$, $p < .001$, but remained significant, suggesting that the effect of coach self-efficacy was partially mediated by bond aspects of the working alliance.

When coach self-efficacy and goal aspects of the working alliance were regressed on coach-rated CE, Goal was significantly related to CE, $\beta = .24$, $t(1623) = 25.98$, $p < .001$, and coach self-efficacy became nonsignificant, $\beta = .03$, $t(1623) = 1.26$, $p = .21$. The results of Sobel's test showed that the parameter estimate for the relationship between coach self-efficacy and CE as reported by coach was significantly lower in the mediated condition, $Z = 6.35$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the effect of coach self-efficacy was fully mediated by goal aspects of the working alliance.

When coachee self-efficacy and task aspects of the working alliance were regressed on coach-rated CE, Task was significantly related to CE, $\beta = .09$, $t(1718) = 7.85$, $p < .001$, and coachee self-efficacy became nonsignificant, $\beta = .04$, $t(1718) = 1.86$, $p = .06$. The results of the Sobel's test showed that the parameter estimate for the relationship between coachee self-efficacy and CE as reported by coach was significant, $Z = 7.08$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the effect of coachee self-efficacy was fully mediated by task aspects of the working alliance.

When coachee self-efficacy and bond aspects of the working alliance were regressed on coach-rated CE, Bond was significantly related to CE, $\beta = .06$, $t(1718) = 5.43$, $p < .001$, and coachee self-efficacy remained a significant predictor, $\beta = .06$, $t(1718) = 2.66$, $p = .008$. The results of Sobel's test showed that the parameter estimate for the relationship between coachee self-efficacy and CE as reported by coach was significantly lower in the mediated condition, $Z = 4.64$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the effect of coachee self-efficacy was partially mediated by bond aspects of the working alliance.

When coachee self-efficacy and goal aspects of the working alliance were regressed on coach-rated CE, Goal was significantly related to CE, $\beta = .10$, $t(1718) = 8.91$, $p < .001$, and coachee self-efficacy became a nonsignificant predictor, $\beta = .03$, $t(1718) = 1.37$, $p = .17$. The results of Sobel's test showed that the parameter estimate for the relationship between coachee self-efficacy and CE as reported by coach was significantly lower in the mediated condition, $Z =$

3.65, $p < .001$, suggesting that the effect of coachee self-efficacy was fully mediated by goal aspects of the working alliance.

This result is similar to those of Baron and Morin (2009), Boyce et al. (2010), and de Haan et al. (2013), who also found that the relationship significantly mediates the other independent variables that correlate with CE.

## Main Discussion

The research confirms Hypothesis 1(a) and (b) but not (c), Hypothesis 2, both (a) and (b), Hypothesis 3, and Hypothesis 4 on the impact of common factors on CE. We have found strong indications that the working alliance as rated by both the coach and coachee correlates with coach- and coachee-rated CE to a considerable degree. As always with statistical correlation, we need to realize that this does not imply causality; that is, CE may predict a strong relationship just as much as the relationship may predict good CE (see the double-headed arrow "B" shown in Figure 1). We have also found indications that coachee self-efficacy correlates with coach- and coachee-rated CE. Finally, we have found very little evidence for a differential impact of coachee personality, coach personality, or coach-coachee personality matching. This means our results are aligned with those reported by Baron and Morin (2009), Boyce et al. (2010), and de Haan et al. (2013) regarding the coaching relationship and with those reported by Stewart et al. (2008) in the area of self-efficacy. We have not been able to confirm the contrasting findings in the area of personality matching by Scoular and Linley (2006).

### MBTI Findings and a Word of Caution

There are only very few indications for a differential impact of matching on the MBTI. This would indicate that the importance of coach–coachee matching in terms of personality or demographics (see Boyce et al., 2010) might be overstated in the coaching practitioner literature. It might be more important to focus on coach selection—in terms of qualifications, accreditation, and supervision records—than on coach–coachee matching, as Wycherley and Cox (2008) and de Haan et al. (2013) also suggest.

However, it must be borne in mind that our findings in relation to the MBTI should be interpreted with some caution. Because of the large size of the sample and the need to minimize the time the coachees spent completing the survey questionnaires, we could not require the participants to complete a full MBTI questionnaire. We fully recognize the limitations of a self-reported personality type based on recall, and we are aware of the various controversies surrounding the use of the MBTI in research settings (Pittenger, 2005). Nevertheless, we decided to utilize this approach because the MBTI is so widely used in business and coaching settings (Zickar & Kostek, 2013) and also in the earlier CE studies that we cited.

### General Observations on the Role of the Working Alliance

We have found good support for the importance of the working alliance (as judged by the coachee), and this aligns with past research in the coaching literature. In the present study the working-alliance scores by coachees predict 31% of total proportion of variance of CE and the working-alliance scores by coaches predict 4% of total proportion of variance of CE (see Table 1).

The significant relationship between working alliance and effectiveness has been found before in psychotherapy (Horvath & Symonds, 1991), and it is important to emphasize that in both coaching and therapy WAI scores by coaches or therapists correlate much less with outcome than WAI scores as rated by coachees or clients. However much we realize the importance of the coaching relationship in terms of outcomes, and for convenience the coaching literature tends to speak about "the coaching relationship" as if it is a singular or monolithic experience, we must also understand that the coachee and coach have their own unique experience of their relationship and may judge it differently, as the lower correlation between their relationship estimates indicates. This is an important point as it suggests that coaches may not be as in tune with their coachees as they

typically assume. It may also help coaches to appreciate the extent to which their experience in coaching can differ from that of their coachees, and, as a result, remind them to apply a more open-minded curiosity about the coachee's experience, both about the coaching relationship and about their progress in coaching.

## Self-Efficacy

Although the quality of the experienced relationship is important, general self-efficacy also has a vital role in determining CE. Given the magnitude of past research on the importance of self-efficacy as a determinant of self-regulated behavior (Bandura, 1991), this finding is unsurprising. However, it should be noted that the strength of the working alliance appears to mediate the impact of self-efficacy on CE. This makes sense in that, if the coach–coachee relationship is poor, this is likely to reduce the coachee's level of confidence in his or her own ability to achieve the goals related to coaching. Furthermore, the relationship of self-efficacy to CE is also impacted by the goals aspect of the working alliance: A strong emphasis on goals in the working alliance may partially compensate for low coachee self-efficacy. These are important points for coaches to keep in mind; a strong coach–coachee relationship and appropriate goal-setting seem to be fundamental aspects of effective coaching.

## Differential Effects of Bond, Task, and Goal Aspects of the Coach–Coachee Relationships

Although we found that there was a positive correlation between the experienced overall working alliance and CE, we also found good evidence for differential effects of various aspects of the coach–coachee working alliance. The task and goal aspects of the working alliance, as rated by the coachee, were significantly more strongly related to CE than the bond aspect. This effect was also observed for the coach ratings: Coaches' assessment of the task and goal aspects of the working alliance are significantly more related to CE than the coaches' assessment of the bond aspect of the working alliance. Moreover, there is confirmation in the significant effect we found in our personality measure: The F/F match seems to result in the highest bond, yet at the same time also in the lowest effectiveness.

These findings stand in contrast to research into the therapeutic working alliance, which has highlighted the relative primacy of the bond or emotional rapport aspects of the therapeutic working alliance, particularly in psychodynamic and client-centered settings (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Horvath & Luborsky, 1993; Mallinckrodt & Nelson, 1991); that is, in therapy it appears that the bond is a vital precursor to client engagement in therapy (Bachelor, 2013; Rogers, 1951), whereas data from the present study would suggest that in coaching the goal and task aspects are of greater importance.

The relationship between different aspects of the working-alliance scores and CE found in the present study echoes Grant's (2014a) findings that the bond aspect of the coach–coachee relationship (as measured by the amount of autonomy support experienced by the coachee) was a less powerful predictor of effectiveness than the goal-focused aspect of the coach–coachee relationship. These findings are also in alignment with Gessnitzer and Kauffeld (2015) that goal and task aspects are far more predictive of CE than the bond aspects of the relationship.

Hence, the findings of the present study, when aligned with Grant's (2014a) and Gessnitzer and Kauffeld's (2015) research, are a poignant reminder to coaches that coaching is an inherently goal- and task-focused enterprise; coachees come to coaching seeking to make changes in their personal or professional lives, and it is the explicit role of the coach to support and facilitate such changes. While the bond aspects of the relationship are important, as coaches we need to place attention on the coachee's goals and the tasks required to attain them.

These findings also point toward a possible new direction in research into the coach–coachee relationship—the effect of different types of coach–coachee relationship on CE. Peterson (2010) presents a nuanced view of the coach–coachee relationship as one that needs to change over the course of a coaching engagement—something we also found as regards the bond aspects of the

working alliance (see the Method section above; see also Grant, 2006; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982). Here the relationship is a tool used to facilitate certain aspects of the change process—being challenging, sceptical, or supportive as the coachee, change, or situation requires.

In addition, it may be that different aspects of the coach–coachee relationship impact differentially depending on the type of coaching. For example, successful skills coaching (which is akin to training) may not require a deep coaching "bond." What counts here is the coach's ability to impart skills to the coachee—a supportive relationship may not be important at all. In contrast, a supportive relationship may be far more important in executive coaching (more akin to therapy), particularly if, for example, goals are related to conflict or personal values (for a discussion of these points see Peterson, 2010).

This issue was not explored in depth in the present study because executive, career, or development coaching yielded very similar characteristics. However, the findings of the present study, which incorporate skills, performance, and development coaching with remedial, reactive, and proactive coaching, suggests that the working alliance is indeed an important factor in CE, regardless of the type of coaching—with the task and goal aspects playing a particularly important role.

## Limitations

There are a number of limitations in the present research. First, every coaching relationship studied was measured only once. Second, our nested design meant that on average 4.85 coaching relationships involved the same coach, and we had insufficient statistical power to do hierarchical linear modeling. This particularly affects the variables provided by the coaches: the coaches' perceived strengths of the relationship and the coaches' MBTI scores and hence also the conclusions on MBTI matching. Third, as previously discussed, we recognize the limitations of a self-reported personality type based on recall and the various controversies surrounding the use of the MBTI in research settings when interpreting these findings. Although there is a strong case to be made for the use of a Five Factor Model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992) in preference to the MBTI, we chose to use the MBTI because it is commonly used, including in other coaching outcome studies, and easy to recall. Despite these shortcomings, we believe that this study has made important contributions to our understanding of coaching and the role of the coach–coachee relationship in facilitating successful coaching outcomes.

## Summary and Future Directions

This is one of the first studies to systematically explore and compare the contribution of various "common factors" that are deemed to predict CE. We have found good evidence for the central importance of the strength of the working alliance as seen from both the coachee's and the coach's perspective. We have also found evidence that the contribution of tasks and goals is more important than that of bonds. This finding may be an important point that differentiates coaching from therapeutic work, and we suggest that future research explore the coach–coachee relationship in more detail.

Second, we have found that coachee self-efficacy is an active ingredient of CE, albeit one that is mediated by predominantly the task and goal aspects of the coach–coachee working alliance.

Third, this study suggests that personality factors and personality matching may play a lesser role as a predictor of success in executive coaching. However, given the methodological issues we encountered in exploring personality factors, we recommend future research continue to explore this issue.

These findings extend past work and provide research that may help guide the coaching industry and the development of evidence-based approaches to coaching, as well as inform the choices that are made in the recruitment, development, deployment, and matching of executive coaches.

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