

# Workplace Coaching and Self-Actualization in the European Union, North America, and post-USSR countries

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**Abstract-** Coaching is increasing in popularity. Studies have found positive correlations between coaching and employees' performance, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and leadership (e.g. Elliger, Elliger, & Keller, 2003; Wales, 2013). However, the relationship between coaching and self-actualization is not well understood. In addition, little is known of cultural differences in coaching. The success of an organization is connected with employees' well-being, self-actualization, and their individual needs to develop their full potential (Maslow, 1970). Therefore, understanding the relationship between coaching and self-actualization may be critical to a company's success. The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a correlation between workplace coaching and self-actualization, and to investigate if there are significant differences between coaching and self-actualization across countries (European Union, North America, and post-USSR countries). The study used a convenient sample of 135 adults who currently reside in the European Union, North America, or post-USSR countries. The survey was conducted anonymously through the Internet, and participants were asked to answer a researcher-developed questionnaire about their workplace coaching experience, and their level of self-actualization, as well as some demographic information. This study found no significant correlation between workplace coaching and self-actualization. However, statistically significant difference between workplace coaching and self-actualization across countries was found. In other words, the cultural background of each employee, and their differences play an important role in the workplace management, and the effectiveness of performance depends on the proper application of management skills in regard to cultural dimensions.

**Index Terms-** coaching, workplace coaching, self-actualization, culture, organizational culture, cross-cultural comparison

## I. INTRODUCTION

Progress in information technology, transportation, and the process of globalization has led to a more interrelated and interconnected world (Salomon, 2016). Part of this world is a corporate one, which has been influenced by an increase in multicultural organizations and a need for cross-cultural management (Adler, 1983; Thomas & Peterson, 2015). People with different cultural backgrounds work together in almost

every organization. Despite their cultural differences, the basic striving of most individuals is the same - to reach their full potential (Rogers, 1951). Reaching full potential is the main focus of self-actualization (Maslow, 1970).

There are different ways of achieving self-actualization, one of which is through intrinsic learning, the process that helps a person to become all that they can (Maslow, 1965). There are different ways to affect employees' growth and development, but the fastest growing means of helping people to achieve these goals is workplace coaching. Facilitating learning and the development of employees is an important factor in organizational success (Valcour, 2014). It is especially popular for executives (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999).

This research paper is focused on workplace coaching, self-actualization, and a cross-cultural comparison of both coaching and self-actualization. These constructs will be described in detail in the literature review.

### A. Coaching

Coaching in one form or another has existed for a long time; however, it became a technique in the modern business world, as recently as the 1960s and 1970s (Bianichi & Steele, 2014). Over the past decade, the use of coaching in the workplace has become increasingly popular (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh, & Parker, 2010; Joo, 2005). Due to the belief that coaching increases employees' job performance and organizational productivity in general, coaching in the workplace is becoming quite common today (Miller, 2010). Coaching involves various disciplines, and it covers many different areas (Cox, 2013). One of the major reasons for hiring coaches is to provide help with developing potential in employees (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009).

There are multiple definitions of coaching (Grant, 2012). However, most of them state that the process of coaching is about assisting individuals to organize and direct their interpersonal and intrapersonal assets towards the development of their professional and personal lives (Grant, 2012). Workplace coaching involves supporting, guiding, and inspiring the learner (Redshaw, 2000). According to the International Coach Federation (ICF) (2015), coaching is the cooperation between a coach and a client in a stimulating and creative process that encourages the client to expand their personal and professional potential.

The coaching process involves helping a client to achieve their goals through determining desired results, increasing motivation, identifying specific goals, developing action plans, and auditing progress (Linley, Harrington, & Garcea, 2010). Workplace coaches are considered to be able to make a significant contribution to the company because of the role they play, which is to produce and evaluate ideas and solutions to the present and potential problems (Bianchi & Steele, 2014).

One of the main purposes of coaching is goal-setting (David, Clutterbuck, & Megginson, 2014). According to Linley et al. (2010), the theory of goal striving is at the center of the coaching process. It is about active individual involvement in the process of goal achievement. Similar to therapists who are using the Humanistic Approach in their practice, coaches, by being facilitators, can help their clients to develop their potential by allowing them being specialists of their own cases (Stober & Grant, 2006).

There are different types of organizational coaching, including leadership, executive, career, and performance coaching. A good workplace coach has experience in all of them (Bianco-Mathis, Roman, & Nabors, 2008). However, most leading multinational companies prefer to use executive coaching (Fazel, 2013). The increased popularity of executive coaching is due to the growing focus on enhancing the productivity of executives and other leaders in organizations (Sherman & Freas, 2004).

Human growth and change are the foundations of coaching (Stober & Grant, 2006). For coaching to be able to go beyond just theoretical knowledge and be applied in practice, it needs a foundation of learning theories (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). One of such theories is Facilitation Theory, also known as the Humanistic Approach, developed by Carl Rogers and others (Laird, 1985). The main proposition of it is that the educator will act as a facilitator during the process of learning and organize the environment for the learners in such a way that they will feel comfortable to contemplate new ideas without being intimidated by outside factors (Laird, 1985). The other theory is an adult-learning theory. Both coaching and adult learning process are focused on the person's willingness to gain new knowledge and readiness for learning (Griffiths, 2005). Instead of teaching, coaching is assisting an individual to learn on their own (Whitmore, 2002).

### *B. Self-actualization*

Abraham Maslow was the first one to introduce the concept of self-actualization (Pettit, Vaught, 1984). According to Maslow (1970), the essential motivation of an individual is "to develop and actualize his fullest potential" (p. 57). Self-actualization can be also applied as self-fulfillment and self-realization (Maclagan, 2003). Self-actualization is the ultimate need when all other, lower leveled human needs are satisfied (Maslow, 1943). However, Coan (1991) stated that the whole idea of self-actualization is very unclear, and it will remain so because the extent of actualization of an individual's innate potential cannot be verified with certainty until those potentials are effectively actualized.

There are theories that directly describe the role of self-actualization role in the workplace, such as the humanistic approach, adult-learning theories, and Theory Y. The humanistic

theory of self-actualization is a one of the common philosophical associations between humanistic therapies and coaching (Stober & Grant, 2006). Theory Y is based on the belief that, with the goal of self-actualization for employees, the organization can find a way to discover hidden resources of creativity, skills, and knowledge (McGregor, 1967). Project managers or leaders can motivate their Theory Y personality type employees through coaching strategies to be more self-motivated, responsible, and committed to their work (Brenner, 2007).

With the help of creative management, which is focused on the development of employees' self-actualization level, concept groups, organization, and with time, the whole community, can benefit (Maslow, 1965). The main reason for this is that self-actualized people are honest, responsible, and fully and selflessly concentrated on what they do, they are self-aware in making choices in order to grow and develop (Maslow, 1965). More employees prioritize work that is interesting to them and where they can satisfy their fulfillment needs to the high-paid jobs (Kovach, 1987). When employees feel that their organization cares about their development and prosperity and are attentive to their needs, then they perform the best way possible to meet the goals of the organization (Jerome, 2013).

### *C. Culture*

There are various definitions of culture (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Hofstede (1984) states that culture is the way people look at world and their role in it, people's values and their perceptions of good and bad, true or false, and the meaning human beings have about different life aspects. According to Schein (2010), organizational culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned by a group while resolving its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, "which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 18).

The theory of Hofstede (1983), which is based on his research, identified and explained four basic dimensions of national cultures, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity. Power distance index is a preferred type of decision making in a hierarchy between superiors and subordinates. The uncertainty avoidance index indicates the level of anxiety and avoidance of actions that can increase it in situations when there are uncertainty and ambiguity. Countries with a high Individualism index value the importance of individual being an active participant independent from the organization, who appreciates freedom and personal time. Collectivistic countries, on the other hand, are focused more on organization's goals in which individuals are dependent on it though working conditions, trainings, and provided benefits. Masculinity signifies such job aspects as earnings, recognition, and competition, while femininity points out cooperation and modesty. These four different dimensions can be used to explain different structures in organizations, different motivations that employees have within organizations, and different challenges that people deal within society (Hofstede, 1983). To be successful in multicultural organizations, managers should apply culturally specific management interventions (Hofstede, 1984).

## II. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Meta-analysis and few empirical studies, have concluded that coaching is an effective tool for an organization (e.g. Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003; Meuse, Dai, & Lee, 2009). Both individual employees and organizations benefit from coaching (Elliger et al, 2003). After analyzing the data of 438 employees' surveys and 67 supervisor surveys in an industrial context, the results showed that there was a positive correlation between supervisory coaching behavior and employees' job satisfaction and performance (Elliger et al., 2003).

In general, workplace coaching improves different aspects in organizational context. The data collected by Wales (2003) demonstrated that coaching had a positive effect on developing the connection between self-development, management development, and organizational effectiveness. Leader effectiveness perceptions were found to be positively related to leader preparation and supportive coaching of self-managed teams (Morgenson, 2005). A longitudinal study conducted by Ladegard (2011) at three points in time (before coaching, after a three-month period of coaching, and a follow-up nine months later) concluded that employees who improved their work planning skills through coaching have a better chance of reducing their stress level.

A study conducted by Tooth, Nielsen, and Armstrong (2013) showed that the main benefits of being coached were in the areas of intrapersonal and interpersonal capacities, especially self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual's confidence that he or she is able, through a certain behavior, to perform specific accomplishments (Bandura, 1977). The results of the evidenced-based studies show that self-efficacy is positively correlated with the career commitment (Niu, 2010), work engagement (Chaudhary, Rangnekar, & Barua, 2012), and that it has a positive impact on workers performance (Judeh, 2012).

These evidence-based findings demonstrate that workplace coaching is generally advantageous for the company and its employees: it has positive effects on employees' performance, job satisfaction, stress level, and self-efficacy (e.g. Elliger et al, 2003; Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Smither et al., 2003; Meuse et al., 2009; Wales, 2013). However, there is very little research evidence about the influence of workplace coaching on employees' self-actualization, despite the fact that it is effective for organizational prosperity (Jerome, 2013).

Margulies (1969) found in his study that there is a relationship between self-actualization and intrinsic work values, industrial work group cooperation, and satisfaction of social needs. The study by Carland, Carland, and Carland (1995) showed that people with higher entrepreneurial drive viewed their businesses as the ways to achieve self-esteem and self-actualization rather than just as providers of their basic financial needs. Hofstede's study (1984) showed that there is a difference in the need for self-actualization depending on the type of culture, individualistic versus collectivistic. Self-actualization is a supreme need in an individualistic society, while in a collectivistic society the sense of belongingness comes before self-actualization and esteem (Hofstede, 1984).

Depending on the culture, coaching experience and level of self-actualization vary in organizations from different countries. One of the largest studies done to investigate the relationships

between culture and societal, organizational, and leader effectiveness was GLOBE (GLOBE, 2014). Even though GLOBE project was mostly focused on leadership effectiveness and culture, its findings also determined how similar and dissimilar to each other depending on their values (GLOBE, 2014).

There are three main gaps in the research provided about coaching and self-actualization. First, the influence of coaching on self-actualization has been presented so far only as a theory. There is no hard data supporting any of the theories provided. Second, most of the published literature is about coaching at the executive level, and not at the other lower level positions in the workplace. The primary form of coaching in current research is executive coaching (Grant, 2003). The third gap is connected with the cross-cultural comparison. There is some data to describe cultural differences, but very limited evidence about coaching and self-actualization in a cross-cultural comparison. Due to the gap in the literature, the main goal of this study is to collect information that will expand the existing knowledge about the relationships between workplace coaching and employees' self-actualization, and their cross-cultural comparison. The first hypothesis is that workplace coaching increases employees' level of self-actualization. The second hypothesis is that there is a significant difference between coaching and self-actualization across countries.

## III. METHOD

### A. Participants

Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. The method of sampling used in the study was convenience sampling. There were 135 participants, the majority of whom were females (69.6%) with only 30.4% males. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 76 years old, with a mean age of 33 years old. The racial and ethnical identity of the participants was predominantly White (66.7%). 19.3% were Hispanic/ Latino, and the rest 14.0% represented Asians (3.0%), Black/ African Americans (2.2%), multiracial individuals (2.2%), and participants of other races (6.6%). Participants' countries of residence were divided into three categories: European Union, North America, and post-USSR countries. European Union category included 25.9% of the participants from countries such as Poland, Germany, Denmark, Spain, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Sweden, and Italy. North America category included 43.7% of the participants from such countries as the United States and Canada. Post-USSR countries included 30.4% of the participants from countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. In the current job category, majority of the participants were professionals (40.0%). 15.6% had managerial positions, 13.3% were at the entry level ones, and 11.9% were self-employed. There were only 5.9% of executives, and 3.0% of unemployed. 11.4% represented other categories not included on the list.

### B. Instrumentation

The survey was designed to measure the relationships between workplace coaching and participants' self-actualization. It was presented into two languages: English and Russian. The survey was translated into Russian by the researcher, who is a native

speaker and reviewed by two other native Russian speakers who confirmed the comprehension and adequacy of the content. The survey contained three parts. The first part consisted of demographic questions, which included gender, ethnicity, age, current job, level of education, annual income, country of birth, and current residency.

The second part of the survey involved questions regarding coaching. There was a set of 7 required-to-answer questions, which included a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. If the participant was coached, then he or she answered a set of 7 questions, the first 6 of which were taken from the Coachees Evaluation of the Impact of Participating in Developmental Coaching (questions 1,2,3,5,6, and 7) (Leonard-Cross, 2010). Question 7 evaluated the relationship between coaching and self-actualization. If the participant was not coached, then he or she answered a set of the similar to the above mentioned 7 questions based upon their perceptions (I think) rather than their beliefs. In the Russian version, there was a definition of coaching provided before asking the 7 questions due to the lack of general understanding of this term and limited use of it.

The third part of the survey was designed to measure self-actualization. Nine items were developed based upon the original work of Bonjean and Vance (1968)'s Short-Form Measure of Self-Actualization. The items were edited to reflect preference as oppose to actual state. That part of survey included a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The estimated time to take a survey was 10 minutes.

### C. Procedure

An Informed Consent Form was provided at the beginning of the survey in both languages: English and Russian, notifying individuals that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, and there were no known risks for participating in the survey. The Informed Consent Form also included information about the general nature of the study, the right to withdraw from the study at any time, data storage, and contact information in case of future questions or interest in knowing the results. In order to start the survey, individuals had to agree with the condition described in the Informed Consent Form.

The data was collected via the Internet using the survey software program QuestionPro from March through August 2016. The survey hyperlink was administered to the participants in one of the three ways: email, text message, or via social media, such as Facebook (in English) and Vkontakte (in Russian).

## IV. RESULTS

There were two main hypotheses for the study. The first one stated that workplace coaching has a positive effect on employees' self-actualization level. It was based on the humanistic theory of self-actualization (Maslow, 1970) and the belief that human growth is a fundamental principal of coaching (Stober & Grant, 2006). The second one stated that there are significant differences between coaching and self-actualization across countries. It was based on the empirical evidence of the cultural dimensions in management in different countries (Hofstede, 1984).

### A. Correlations

The correlation test was run to find out if there is a correlation between self-actualization index and coaching index. There were two correlations: the first one for the index of the participants who have been coached and self-actualization index, and the second one for the index of the participants who have not been coached and self-actualization index. The correlation test results (see Table 1) showed that in both cases correlations were not statistically significant. The correlation between coaching index of those who have been coached at the workplace and self-actualization index was  $r = .188$ , and  $p = .140$ . The correlation between coaching index of those who have not been coached at the workplace and self-actualization index was  $r = .187$ , and  $p = .116$ .

### B. ANOVA Analysis

The ANOVA test was used to identify if there was a statistically significant difference in the test scores of self-actualization index among the three groups of participants based on their place of residence: European Union, North America, or post-USSR country. The ANOVA test results (see Table 2) showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the average scores of self-actualization index between those from European Union ( $\mu = 31.543$ ) and those from North America ( $\mu = 30.932$ ) ( $p = .543$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ), and between those from post-USSR countries ( $\mu = 30.024$ ) and those from North America ( $\mu = 30.932$ ) ( $p = .175$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ). But the mean self-actualization score for those from European Union was statistically significantly lower than the score for those from post-USSR countries ( $p = .019$ ).

### C. Chi-square test

The Chi-square test was run to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in workplace coaching experiences in terms of the place of residence (European Union, North America, or post-USSR country). The Chi-square test results (see Table 4) showed a Sig. (p) value of .021, indicating that there is a statistically significant difference among workplace coaching experiences (being coached vs. not being coached at the workplace) when it comes to the place of residence.

## V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to verify two hypotheses. The first hypothesis was about the positive correlation between the workplace coaching and employees' level of self-actualization. The results showed that there was no statistically significant correlation between these two variables. There are multiple reasons that could explain these findings. The first challenge with HR coaching is that there is a lack of trust between the coaches and those whom the coaching is intended for (Spence, Armour, Driessen, Lea, & North, 2016). The lack of benevolence, competence, and integrity could be a possible explanation of coaching failure to succeed in many organizations (Spence et al.,

2016). This provides evidence for the need of official regulations to become a coach.

The second issue is that there is no best mechanism to evaluate coaching (Grant, 2012), and there is a lack in evaluation of coaching programs by organizations (Leonard-Cross, 2010). It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of coaching because of its nature and differences in factors for each coachee, such as goals, background, and other circumstantial factors (Grover & Furnham, 2016).

The third issue is that most of the research done thus far about coaching and its effectiveness is based on the executive level positions (Grant, 2003). Only 5.9% of the participants in this study represented executives. This shows that there is a possible need for improving the practice of coaching among all the positions across organization, not only executive ones, and that there is a need for more empirical evidence in coaching practices around the whole organization.

The second hypothesis was that there is a significant difference between coaching and self-actualization across countries. The ANOVA test results showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the level of self-actualization of the participants from European Union and post-USSR countries, which is important for the organizational management to take into consideration and be culturally specific in their practices. There was no significant difference between the level of self-actualization of the participants from European Union and North America, or from post-USSR countries and North America. This result can be explained by the higher level of variability among the participants from North America because there is more diversity in culture (Campbell & Kean, 2016).

The Chi-square test results showed a statistically significant difference in the workplace coaching experience (being coached vs. not being coached at the workplace) and the participants' place of residence, including European Union, North America, and post-USSR countries. These findings can be explained by the cultural differences across countries, and coaching popularity in North America and Europe, and lack of its exposure in post-USSR countries. It is a relatively new phenomenon there.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of those countries that were part of it began moving in the direction of the Western management system. But this process is very slow because of the Communist-based centrally planned economy that existed there for decades and the diversity among central and eastern European countries. When it comes to management, people are still debating whether they want to continue being under the social benefits of Communist regime, or they want to get rid of extensive political power on top of them and start planning new economy policy (Perlitz & Seger, 2004). In order to be more efficient in their economy markets, post-Soviet Union countries need to evolve business environment that exist in Europe and Western countries, their business strategies and management style (McCarthy, Vikhanski, Puffer, & Naumov, 2005). Since they are only at the beginning stage of this transition, and because of the lack of experience in Western-style management system, workplace coaching is not very popular phenomenon there yet. However, little by little it is moving in this direction.

## VI. LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to this study. Due to the use of the convenient sampling, the data cannot be generalized to a larger population. Discrepancies in cell sizes representing unequal number of participants, and different interpretations of the definition of coaching based on the participants' personal assessments and experience could have affected the results.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, culture and cultural background of employees directly influence success of an organization. European Union, North America and post-USSR countries consist of many very distinct management cultures that differ by particular country. Leaders and management team members should take it into consideration when planning their strategies. Self-actualization level and need for it also varies depending on the culture. In some places, coaching can be a good source to help develop it, while in others there maybe alternatives, which are more efficient.

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Table 1

**Correlations**

		Coaching Index Of Coached Participants	Self- Actualization Index
Coaching Index Of Coached Participants	Pearson Correlation	1	.188
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.140
	N	63	63
Self-Actualization Index	Pearson Correlation	.188	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.140	
	N	63	63

**Correlations**

		Coaching Index Of Uncoached Participants	Self- Actualization Index
Coaching Index Of Uncoached Participants	Pearson Correlation	1	.187
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.116
	N	72	72
Self-Actualization Index	Pearson Correlation	.187	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.116	
	N	72	72

Table 2

**Descriptives**

Self-Actualization Index

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
European Union	35	31.543	1.9303
North America	59	30.932	2.6708
Post-USSR countries	41	30.024	2.2526
Total	135	30.815	2.4256

**ANOVA**

Self-Actualization Index

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	44.980	2	22.490	3.993	.021
Within Groups	743.390	132	5.632		
Total	788.370	134			

**Multiple Comparisons**

**Table 3** Dependent Variable: Self-Actualization Index  
Sidak

(I) Country of Residence	(J) Country of Residence	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
European Union	North America	.6107	.5063	.543
	Post-USSR countries	1.5185*	.5461	.019
North America	European Union	-.6107	.5063	.543
	Post-USSR countries	.9078	.4825	.175
Post-USSR countries	European Union	-1.5185*	.5461	.019
	North America	-.9078	.4825	.175

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Have you ever been coached\* Country of Residence Crosstabulation**

			Country of Residence			Total
			European Union	North America	Post-USSR countries	
Have you ever been coached	1.0	Count	15	35	13	63
		% of Total	11.1%	25.9%	9.6%	46.7%
	2.0	Count	20	24	28	72
		% of Total	14.8%	17.8%	20.7%	53.3%
Total		Count	35	59	41	135
		% of Total	25.9%	43.7%	30.4%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.687 <sup>a</sup>	2	.021
Likelihood Ratio	7.796	2	.020
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.213	1	.271
N of Valid Cases	135		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.33.