An Integrative Trust Model in the Coaching Context

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This paper presents a conceptualization of trust in the coaching context. Despite the vast presence of prescriptive literature, research exploring the process of coaching is minimal. In order to achieve coaching outcomes trust must be established; however the role of trust in the coaching relationship seems to be implicitly understood and remains unexplored. In light of the gap in knowledge, this paper focused on trustworthiness factors that contribute to trust development in the coaching relationship and introduced a trust model based on three critical factors for trust development: ability, benevolence, and integrity. The model could be utilized by coaching professionals in order to effectively develop, promote, and sustain clients' trust. The paper also presents a practical application of the model.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the business environment started recognizing the impact of trust on organizations' strategic success and its significant contribution on acquisition of competitive advantage (Castaldo, Premazzi, & Zerbini, 2010; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007; Sherwood & De Paolo, 2005). The research has generated considerable evidence on trust's numerous benefits for both individuals and organizations (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004). The importance of trust has been further recognized in leadership, performance management, job satisfaction, knowledge sharing, and organizational commitment (Castaldo et al., 2010; Hatzakis 2009; Lee, Gillespie, Mann, & Wearing, 2010; Mooradian, Renzl, & Mateler, 2006; Lount, 2006; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Also, increased workforce diversity among organizations has reinforced the importance of trust (Mayer et at., 1995).

Trust is a key element in every social interaction which provides the foundation for effective relationships (Hardin, 2006; Reina & Reina, 2006). For example, professional relationships are more productive and less costly when trust is established (Lount, 2006). The decision to trust an individual is a complex cognitive and affective process involving various factors, from estimates of potential costs versus rewards and personal vulnerability to expectations of individual's benevolence in an exchange characterized by future uncertainty (Kenworthy & Jones, 2009).

In the coaching setting, establishing a relationship of trust constitutes a first step in the coaching process that allows the relationship to grow and flourish while increasing the likelihood for elevated

performance (Baron & Morin, 2009; O'Broin & Palmer, 2010; Peterson, 1996). Nevertheless, little research currently exists and has been dedicated to characteristics and qualities important in the formation of coaching relationships (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010). One of the top characteristics of an effective coaching relationship is the ability to form a strong connection with the client while achieving a fine balance between support and challenge (Bluckert, 2005). In order for a client to take risks necessary to learn, develop, and change, the coach has to create a safe space and develop trust. Only through trust can a client feel safe enough to reveal vulnerabilities, expose mistakes and deficiencies, and ultimately grow. Even though researchers have largely emphasized the positive sides of trust, the lack of trust in the coaching relationship leads to various negative implications (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010; Kim et al., 2004). This is why any discussion about effectiveness of a coaching relationship acknowledges the importance of trust. A side from being recognized and developed in the relationship, trust also has to be sustained throughout the process otherwise, it is difficult and costly to regain trust and reach a desirable productivity level (Cladwell & Jeane, 2007).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The paper draws on the contemporary literature in organizational trust and coaching. The literature review was derived from the several subject areas: business, management, and psychology. Databases utilized include: PsycInfo, Emerald, and ProQuest. Keywords for the search criteria were: organizational trust, coaching, trust building model, and an integrative model of trust. The primary aim of this paper is to provide novice and experienced coaching professionals with a clear and concrete factors that promote, build, and sustain trust in a coaching relationship. The paper revolves around the question: how can one effectively promote trust within the coaching relationship?

A well established model of trust called "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust" was used as a basis for our conceptual framework. According to the model, ability, benevolence, and integrity are important antecedents of trust (Mayer et at., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). The implication of the ability as an antecedent of trust is that it creates a framework of trust that is domain specific. The level of trust within the same relationship may vary based on the ability across different domains. Accordingly, the approach to trust as domain specific enables the adaptation of the model in the coaching setting.

A conceptual framework for coaching practice was guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Based on SDT, the coaching relationship should support the coachee's satisfaction for the three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Spence & Oades, 2011). The coachee's performance is conditioned by the satisfaction of his/her needs to freely engage in activities (autonomy), produce via the use of his/her capacities (competence), and form social connections (relatedness). The presence of a coach provides the coachee with autonomy support, by valuing the coachee's personal interests; with competence support, by acknowledging the coachee's capacities and strengths; and with relatedness support, by exhibiting genuine caring, trust, and honesty. With an SDT approach, the coach provides relatedness support through development of a trusting relationship which creates a platform for effective coachee development.

COACHING PRACTICE

Coaching with its broad application and interdisciplinary roots has advanced considerably in the past few decades (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Moen & Federici, 2012; Spence & Oades, 2011). Complex business environments have led to the rise of organizational coaching used as a strategic tool for enhancing job performance (Bennett & Bush, 2009; Stewart, Palmer, Wilkin, & Kerrin, 2008). The aim of coaching is to help individuals or groups become self-directed in their learning and development (Bennett & Bush, 2009). Coaching is concerned with improvement of individual's cognitive and emotional self-regulation (Spence & Oades, 2011).

Many organizations have made coaching an integral part of their employee development programs (McDermott, Levenson, & Newton, 2007). Initially utilized exclusively for executive and leadership

development, nowadays coaching is used at all levels within organizations (Bennett & Bush, 2009). Growth and development, as central elements of coaching, may be quite challenging and can impede the attainment of desired outcomes (Moen & Federici, 2012; Spence & Oades, 2011). Therefore, a client should be met with respect, cooperation, and trust which establishes the platform for the important coaching work to follow (Ives, 2012; McComb, 2012).

Coaching Defined

Coaching is a one-on-one working relationship that serves to fulfill an organization's performance goals and needs (Swanson & Holton, 2009). Peterson and Hicks (1996) have defined coaching as "the process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective" (p.14). According to Ives (2012) coaching approaches can be categorized into three paradigms: goal-focused, developmental, and therapeutic. Goal-focused coaching operates at the first level of change while developmental coaching seeks to affect a lasting change and helps an individual learn new behaviors and beliefs. Therapeutic coaching focuses on achieving a profound inner change. Griffiths and Campbell (2009) defined coaching as "a goal-directed, multi-faceted process for enhancing people, work and life" (p.17). This definition acknowledges the commonalities that underpin most forms of coaching like goal-directed orientation and universal outcomes regardless of the coaching form being applied.

THE CONSTRUCT OF TRUST

Although vastly researched, trust remains an interpersonal phenomenon without universally adopted definition (Hasmer 1995; Kramer, 1999; Lount, 2010; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011). This is one of the reasons why the study of trust is considered to be problematic (Mayer et al,, 1995). The most common definition represents trust as an individual's willingness to become vulnerable to another individual with some hope of a positive outcome (Lount, 2006; Mayer et al., 1995; Sherwood & De Paolo, 2005).

Another reason that may make the construct of trust difficult to define is the confusion between trust and its antecedents (Mayer et al., 1995). This results from using various terms like risk, cooperation, predictability, and confidence synonymously with trust. For example, trust is not equal to risk or taking a risk per se, but represents a willingness to take a risk. Trust leads to a risk taking in relationships and refers to a person's awareness that something is jeopardized and could be lost if another person is not acting favorably (Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011; Schoorman et al., 2007).

The Foundations of Trust

According to Hatzakis (2009) trust has two foundations – cognitive basis and affective basis. Cognitive basis of trust is formed based on evidence, while affective trust is related to human emotions. In the majority of professional relationships, ambiguity is always present to a certain degree. Finding the right course of action requires an individual to form a judgment, and according to Hardin (2006), this judgment does not involve choice. For cognitive based trust, knowledge we gain about the trustee (a party to be trusted) determines whether we are going to trust that person. When people trust, that means they know or think they know, just enough information needed for trust to develop. Therefore, wrong information could mislead people into trusting or mistrusting. Generally, people trust over certain ranges of actions. This outlook on trust is based on rational theory that emphasizes the importance of interest. It states that trust is generated when a person has a reason to believe that it is in the other person's interest to be trustworthy in a relevant context (Hardin, 2006). From the rational stand point, trust grows gradually between strangers and over certain ranges of actions, while the initial trust is low (Hardin, 2006; Lount, 2006).

A more recent approach to trust involves affective responses (Schoorman et al., 2007). According to this approach, emotional states have an effect on trust. For example, emotional attachment can cause the trustor to take a risk not necessarily warranted by any evidence. Proponents of the cognitive approach argue that even though emotions could affect trust, it is only temporary and soon after one would return to

a rational perspective. The model that we further discuss takes a cognitive approach to trust (Schoorman et al., 2007).

The Model of Organizational Trust

In 1995, Mayer et al. integrated various perspectives on trust by scholars from diverse disciplines and developed a model of trust named "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust" (See Figure 1). The model has a general application, on both the macro and micro levels of an organization and it can be used across multiple disciplines. The model received broad empirical support and has been used in various organizational settings since its development (Lee et al., 2010; Schoorman et al., 2007).

The model consists of trustor's characteristics, trustee's characteristics, and the relationship between trust and risk. The trustor's trait, a propensity to trust, is defined as an individual's expectation about the trustworthiness of others. People's propensity to trust varies due to different personality types, cultural background, and developmental experiences (Mooradian et. al, 2006; Schoorman et al., 2007). This trait influences the probability of the extant to which a party would trust. The propensity to trust is a stable factor across different situations and may help explain the variance in trust among individuals.

FIGURE 1
AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST
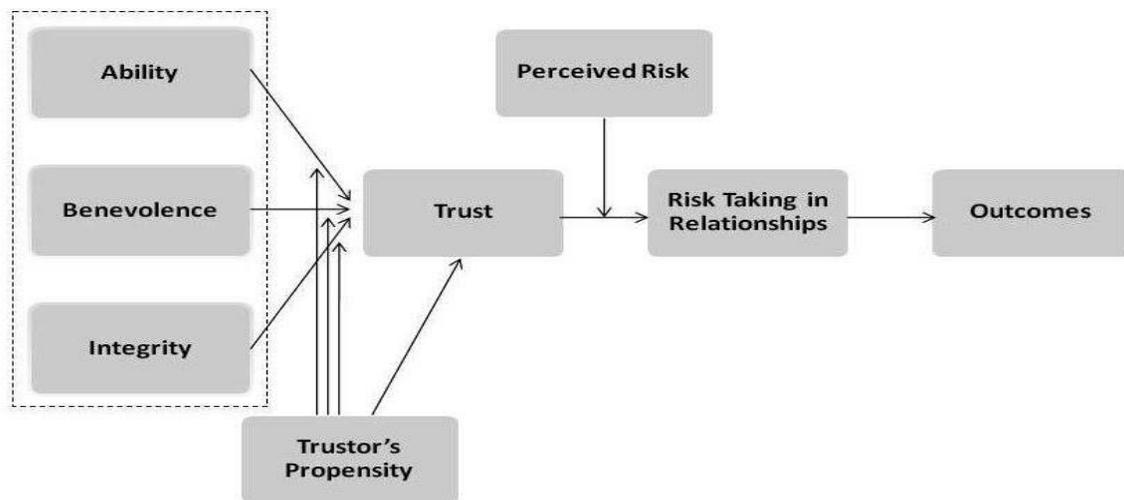
Established factors of trustworthiness or trustee's characteristics are individual's ability, benevolence, and integrity. Perception about an individual's ability, benevolence, and integrity has an impact on how much trust one can generate (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). The ability factor refers to a set of competencies one has within a certain domain. This means a person could possess ability in one specific area and therefore be trusted with work in that area. The benevolence factor is represented as the extent to which a person is believed to have a good intention. This factor could be described as the trustee's positive orientation towards the trustor. The integrity factor is defined as abiding by a set of principles and being held accountable for following through (Mayer et al., 1995). The time dimension concerning these three factors varies. For example, trustor's judgment on trustee's ability and integrity forms quickly while benevolence takes more time.

All three trustworthiness characteristics are theoretically distinct but have an additive quality in determining the level of trust (Schoorman et al., 1996; Schoorman et al., 2007). Each factor is insufficient to cause trust unless all three factors are high. All three factors need to be considered in making a choice about trust.

The Trust Model in the Coaching Context

Through the previously established conceptualization of trust, the researchers developed a trust building model aimed towards a coaching context. This model is based on the portion of "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust" that contains factors that contribute to trustee's trustworthiness - ability, benevolence, and integrity (See Figure 2). Even though the model deals with the factors involving both parties – trustor and trustee, the model does not assume that trust in dyadic relationships is reciprocal. Although trust is viewed as mutual and reciprocal in the leadership literature, empirical studies on the reciprocal linkage are rare (Schoorman et al., 2007). Since this paper is aimed to help coaching professionals garner clients' trust our focus is solely on the trustee – a coach.

FIGURE 2
PROPOSED TRUST MODEL IN THE COACHING SETTING

Ability

The first trustworthiness factor, a coach's ability, relates to a set of skills and characteristics necessary for effective coaching. The coach utilizes a variety of behavioral science techniques and methods to help a client achieve job-related goals and improve performance (Bennett & Bush, 2009). Technical expertise and problem solving skill are the two elements exemplifying a coach's ability factor (Nguyen, 2010; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). Technical expertise refers to certification acquired via professional coach organization, completed formal coach training, or a master's and/or doctoral degree in a related fields, such as psychology, communications, training, or adult development (Bennett & Bush, 2009). Problem solving skill represents an ability to solve and manage situations of conflict and to take into consideration all parties involved, both client's and employer's needs. A coach should constantly demonstrate the ability factor. According to Bluckert (2005) when the coach is perceived as incompetent, lacking skills and understanding to operate as a proper guide and safety net, the client is led to a real sense of anxiety. Anxiety, as a form of low emotional stability, leads to withholding of trust (Kenworthy & Jones, 2009). Also, induced anxiety may affect coaching transfer by undermining the client's motivation to learn (Stewart et al., 2008). Therefore, it is important for a coach to consistently exhibit the ability factor throughout the coaching process.

Benevolence

The second trustworthiness factor, benevolence, relates to a coach's intentions to serve the client's best interest. Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) refer to benevolence as "operational benevolence" which recognizes that motivation for benevolence needs to be operationalized and visible. While exploring the

client's goals and views of the work situation, a benevolent coach would provide support, restrain from self-serving opportunism, express consideration for the client's welfare through empathy and non-judgmental behavior, and move beyond the conditions of the explicit contract. According to Bluckert (2005), coaches often find it difficult to take a non-judgmental approach and for the same reason many also have a problem expressing empathy. Therefore the benevolence factor in the coaching setting has the potential to be more challenging than the other two factors.

Furthermore, the research explored the factors that elicit and affect benevolence in a context of business import-export relationships and found cultural familiarity as an important variable (Lee, Lee & Suh, 2007). Workplace diversity may cause employees to be less able to relate to each other based on the lack of similarities or common background. When this situation is present the need for and importance of benevolence is reinforced (Schoorman et al., 2007). Therefore, a benevolent coach should acquire a cultural familiarity that refers to coach's familiarity with the client's country of origin, its business practices, language, and political systems (Lee et al., 2007). For example, according to Mayer et al., (1995) cultural values influence individual's cognition and since trust is based on a cognitive foundation we could assume that cultural background could potentially influence client's trust. Through an understanding of cultural knowledge, a coach is able to adapt to the client's cross-cultural differences and to appeal to his/her way of thinking (Bluckert, 2005).

Integrity

The last trustworthiness factor, integrity, comes from reliable promises, sharing of valid information, and expressions of honesty. Integrity is marked by values like openness, sense of deep commitment, self-expression, honesty, respect, reliability, discipline, and personal responsibility (Gardner, 2006; Kingley, 2005). Kingley proposed a process named 'integrity mapping' for maintaining and developing integrity. The process consists of constant reflection and application of core values which build integrity. A person with integrity constantly takes time for reflection and daily analysis. A coach could create a list of professional values, define each value, prioritize these values in order of importance, and regularly reflect on these values to keep them alive. While demonstrating these values by using them in everyday interactions with a client, a coach would be perceived as a person of integrity. Even before the coaching relationship starts developing, the client will most likely obtain information about a coach's integrity through a third-party source in order to be assured that a coach is a reputable person with a result proven track record.

A coach's ability, benevolence, and integrity are equally important in gaining the client's trust. For example, the client may believe that the coach is able to provide a quality service, but that only ensures that the coach would be able to perform, but not necessarily be willing to perform. Also, the perception that the coach has integrity suggests fulfillment of the promised service, but if the coach's ability is questionable, again there will be no trust. Furthermore, if the coach is perceived as benevolent, but his/her track record with previous clients is inconsistent, again trust will be lacking. The client will most likely take all three factors – ability, benevolence, and integrity, into consideration before making a decision to trust. Therefore incorporating a developed trustworthiness model into a coaching process may increase the likelihood of success in terms of gaining a client's trust and establishing a sound foundation for a coaching relationship.

Practical Application

The trustworthiness factors could be implemented throughout various coaching models. Zeus and Skiffington's (2003) four stages of coaching process will be used to illustrate how to implement the trustworthiness factors throughout each stage of the process.

At the first phase with a client the coach could demonstrate the:
- Ability factor by clarifying the role of a coach in the process and explaining the logistics of the coaching program.

- Benevolence factor through openly asking the client how he or she may feel about the process and also be familiar with the client's cultural background.

At the second phase when working with a client, the coach could demonstrate:
- Ability while introducing issues of trust and discussing the confidentiality agreement.
- Benevolence through inquiring about potential concerns and what trust means to the client.
- Integrity while sharing an established summary of professional values with a client.

At the third phase when working with a client, the coach could demonstrate:
- Benevolence while listening to a client's reports about successes and failures and addressing identified obstacles and difficulties with empathy and a non- judgmental approach.

At the fourth phase when working with a client the coach could demonstrate:
- Integrity while reflecting on everything that has been done in the previous phases and developing a specific strategy that would allow a client to stay on track maintaining what has been learned throughout the coaching process.

CONCLUSION

Because of the rapid growth in the field of coaching over the last decade, considerable perplexity surrounds the understanding of coaching (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). The aim of this paper was to offer coaching professionals and organizations the practical steps on how to foster a trusting relationship with a client. The coach's ability to form a trusting relationship determines the extent to which a client will accept the coach's perspective and thus change. This article takes a step towards developing a theoretical basis and practical guide to trust development in a coaching setting. The proposed trust model includes trustworthiness factors and describes how each factor contributes to the formation of trust in the coaching relationship. The model could be utilized by coaching professionals in order to effectively develop, promote, and sustain a client's trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The model presented in this paper focused solely on a coach's perspective. Therefore a propensity to trust that represents a client's trait was not examined. For future research, it would be useful to incorporate a client's perspective. The propensity to trust is viewed as a comprehensive factor that is conditioned on a client's personality type, cultural background, and developmental experience. Identifying specific personality types and their effect on an individual's propensity to trust would help coaches tailor the coaching relationship to individual clients. Moreover, the effect of culture on the perceptions of ability, benevolence and integrity is a potential area for future research. For example, action-oriented, competitive cultures tend to place more value on the ability factor while collaborative cultures tend to place more value on the benevolence factor (Schoorman et al., 2007).

The length of the coach-client relationship has a different impact on each trustworthiness factor. A client's judgment about the coach's ability and integrity could form rather quickly in the course of the coaching relationship while benevolence factor requires more time. Furthermore, according to Schoorman et al., (2007) in a long-term working relationship, benevolence would have more influence than integrity. Future studies could explore the time dimension for each factor along with their influence within different time frames. This would allow coaches to exhibit ability, benevolence, and integrity in accordance with the given length of the coaching relationship.

Lastly, today's organizations are increasingly utilizing virtual coaching to connect with clients worldwide (Bennett & Bush, 2009). This involves coaching done entirely over the phone or internet, via email or text messaging. While coaches have new technologies at their disposal to deliver coaching,

technology may pose a major influence on the nature of coaching in the future. Specifically, increased use of technology could create new challenges for the formation of trust in the coaching relationships.

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