

Emotional Approach Strategies in Coaching Psychology

Working Group on Coaching Psychology and Emotional Regulation
of the Coaching Psychology Section of the COPC
(Official College of Psychology of Catalonia)

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SUMMARY

The objective of this study is to identify the various perspectives, theories, and emotional approach strategies used in Coaching Psychology processes, with the aim of providing COPC members with a broad overview of current frameworks of practice. More specifically, this research explores how Coaching Psychologists address emotional aspects in their professional practice, and to what extent this approach contributes to the success of the processes.

Following a qualitative methodology, the study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 30 accredited Coaching Psychologists. Participants were asked about their views on emotions in relation to achieving change; identifying and facilitating emotional expression; the relationship between emotions, values, beliefs, and the educational and sociocultural background of the coachee; managing intense emotional responses and latent emotions; distinguishing between emotions, feelings, and moods and their influence on the process; and managing the coach's own emotions before, during, and after the sessions.

The study concludes that Coaching Psychologists generally draw on more than one approach, and that they regard emotions as a valuable source of information for the development of the process. Facilitating emotional expression helps increase the coachee's self-awareness and motivation to achieve the agreed goal. Thus, it is clear that professionals in this discipline view the addressing of emotional aspects as a key factor for successful outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

This is an exploratory study conducted by the Working Group on Coaching Psychology and Emotional Regulation of the COPC, focusing on the emotional strategies used by professionals in Coaching Psychology.

The Working Group (WG) on Coaching Psychology and Emotional Regulation was created in September 2015 and approved by the Board of Directors of the Coaching Psychology Section in February 2016. The WG's general objective is to deepen the study and practical application of Coaching Psychology for Personal Development (Life Coaching), with particular emphasis on the regulation of emotions.

The exchange of experiences and working tools during WG meetings highlighted the diversity of professional practices regarding the handling of emotions in Coaching Psychology processes. This generated genuine interest in understanding how other Coaching Psychology professionals approached emotions in their practice, and the WG decided to launch an exploratory study.

The purpose of this study is to identify the various perspectives, theories and emotional approach strategies used in Coaching Psychology processes, in order to provide members with a broad overview of current practice frameworks that can help improve their professional work, both in processes where emotional regulation is directly related to the goal and in those where it is not.

Following Cox and Bachkirova (2007), we start from the premise that professional coaching practice is highly diverse in its approach to emotions. These authors identify the following four approaches: 1) emotions are not formally considered (for example, focusing exclusively on cognitive or behavioural aspects); 2) emotions are seen as a problem or simply outside the scope of coaching; 3) emotions are used as useful information for the development of the process (for example, identifying fear that hinders change); 4) emotional aspects are placed at the core of the sessions and regarded as the key determinant of the process's success.

On the other hand, we argue that the absence of knowledge and experience in emotional regulation within the coaching process may have undesirable effects on professional practice. First, it may lead the coach's actions to be biased by stereotypes and prejudices (for example, assuming that a man who becomes emotionally overwhelmed during the session must have a psychological disorder). Second, it may prevent the professional from distinguishing between empathy and the phenomena of transference and countertransference. Finally, inadequate attention to emotions may limit the scope of change for the coachee. Conversely, the presence of knowledge and experience in emotional regulation can facilitate the identification of cases that may be appropriately addressed within Coaching Psychology and those that should be referred to psychotherapy.

For all these reasons, this study examines the following research question: How do Coaching Psychologists address emotional aspects in their professional practice, and to what extent this approach contributes to the success of Coaching Psychology processes?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Emotional Experience

Emotional experience and expression are essential to human beings. Emotions reflect our bodies, our histories, and our predispositions. They help us to understand ourselves, to predict our behaviour, and to communicate to others what we need or want. The ability to manage emotions effectively is a human capacity that facilitates social adjustment and overall well-being. No specific emotion regulation strategy is inherently adaptive or maladaptive; rather, it is the context and situational demands that determine whether a given strategy is adaptive (Hofmann, 2018).

Difficulties in regulating emotions and impulses are associated with poor physical, psychological, and social adjustment. Emotion regulation involves the processes responsible for controlling, evaluating, and modifying emotional responses in order to achieve personal goals (Thompson, 1994). Emotion regulation encompasses the maintaining, enhancing, or inhibiting emotions. Through emotion regulation, we can influence the valence, intensity, and temporal characteristics of an emotion. Emotions are not modified exclusively through self-regulation strategies, they can also be regulated by others. Moreover, emotion regulation has a function; in other words, emotions are regulated for a reason and oriented toward a goal (Hofmann, 2018).

Emotions and Coaching

Coaching encourages individuals to increase their self-awareness regarding their thoughts, moods, and emotions (Neenan & Palmer, 2001). A study conducted by Chapman (2005) concluded that coaching processes based on cognitive and behavioural frameworks and solutions-oriented approaches can lead to significant increases in coachees' emotional intelligence.

Duffell and Lawton Smith (2015) distinguish three perspectives on how emotions are addressed in coaching: 1) the first considers emotions aspects to be ignored in organisational contexts, on the assumption that the coach's primary aim is to promote rationality; 2) the second acknowledges the significance of emotions, but seeks to manage and control them, still regarding them as inconvenient; 3) the third, which has gained prominence in recent years, understands emotions as information that can be valuable in the coaching process. Emotions have a purpose and can therefore be considered intentional phenomena. The emergence of emotions, and the need to regulate them, can provide valuable information within the coaching process and simultaneously increase the client's awareness.

It is evident that emotions arise when something meaningful occurs for the individual. Consequently, it can be argued that emotions represent an important and valuable dimension that can provide information and serve as a focus of analysis to inform and effectively guide the coaching process.

However, working with emotions in coaching is not without challenges. First, there are semantic and conceptual issues. Second, difficulties arise from the inaccuracy of memory, the impact of emotion regulation strategies, and the reinterpretation and reconstruction of emotionally charged experiences and events; and finally, the fact that emotions are a highly personal experience, closely tied to the constructs and language of both the client and the coach (Duffell & Lawton Smith, 2015).

Emotions as Facilitators of Change

Through the coaching conversation, the coach may become aware of the relationship between the coachee's negative feelings and the diminished ability to solve problems, while also gaining an understanding of the interconnections and interdependence among emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. Emotions are essential components of human experience, and recognising their role in the process of change is a fundamental element of effective coaching interventions (David, 2005).

Self-focused attention has been described as a specific cognitive bias closely associated with negative affect. Nevertheless, self-focused attention also plays an important role in self-regulatory processes oriented toward goal attainment, as it enables the individual to gather information about the discrepancy between their current state and a significant standard, and to engage in behaviours aimed at reducing this discrepancy. Emotions are not the direct product of any particular behaviour, but rather of the perceived discrepancy between the present state and the desired state (Hofmann, 2018).

The affective system constitutes a critical element both for the understanding and for the transformation of human experience and behaviour. Emotion is intimately linked to meaning; in fact, no emotional change occurs without a corresponding cognitive change. However, according to Greenberg and Paivio (2000), personal reality and consciousness are shaped more by emotions than by thought or rationality. It is the emotional meaning of events, automatically constructed by emotional schemas, that determines both emotional awareness and cognitive responses. Emotions regulate mental functioning by organising both thought and action. Indeed, emotions establish the goals toward which cognitions and actions are directed, making affect a crucial determinant of human behaviour (Greenberg & Paivio, 2000).

Identification and Expression of Emotions

As there is no universal definition of emotions, the coaching conversation must facilitate a shared understanding. Emotional experience is highly personal, and we can experience multiple emotions simultaneously. The labels we assign to each emotion are merely markers and not an exact description of what the brain is doing. During the coaching conversation, it is possible to address the coachee's level of awareness (or lack thereof) of their reactions, as well as the physiological responses and behaviours that are triggered as a result of the appraisal process that evaluates the event as positive

or negative. Bringing painful emotions into awareness may constitute an important task in a coaching process (Duffell & Lawton Smith, 2015).

The extent to which an emotion produces an organising or disorganising effect depends on the degree to which it is integrated into our awareness. Emotions not only need to be activated; they also need to be made conscious, differentiated, reflected upon, and expressed in socially appropriate ways. Consciously experiencing the emotion in connection with the object that evokes it provides individuals with greater control over their emotional reactions and enables learning opportunities. Greenberg and Paivio (2000) highlight the importance of helping clients develop an attitude of openness and acceptance toward their feelings and their ever-changing nature. According to these authors, the development of emotional regulation is one of the most important tasks in both personal and interpersonal growth. The ability to regulate emotions appropriately constitutes the ultimate criterion of health (Greenberg & Paivio, 2000).

Another aspect to consider is the way in which emotions are represented and communicated through language. Emotions are experienced as complex phenomena that may not be adequately captured by words. Likewise, the verbal expressions used by the coach can influence subsequent interactions. When individuals hear descriptions made about them, they may unconsciously seek ways to behave consistently with those descriptions. An imprecise paraphrase may therefore have adverse effects. Coaches must be aware of the implications of language and remain attentive when providing feedback on the emotions expressed by coachees (Duffell & Lawton Smith, 2015).

The Relationship Between Emotions, Values and Beliefs

Emotions are not the direct consequence of an event or situation, but rather of its perception and interpretation (cognitive appraisal). Individuals who remain emotionally healthy in the face of adversity tend to exhibit a positive bias toward events, display optimism about the future, and maintain an illusion of control over what is to come. General beliefs (or cognitive schemas) about the self, the world, and the future underlie cognitive distortions regarding events and situations, giving rise to maladaptive automatic cognitions. Emotional reasoning is a process that relies on one's emotional experience to validate thought, thereby fuelling a feedback loop in which emotional experience reinforces belief (Hofmann, 2018).

The Relationship Between Emotions and Educational and Sociocultural Background

Hofmann (2018) defines emotion as a multidimensional experience characterized by varying levels of arousal and pleasure/displeasure; involving subjective experiences, somatic experiences, and motivational tendencies; influenced by contextual and cultural factors; and subject to regulation, to some extent, through both intra- and interpersonal processes. Emotional experiences depend on the

frame of reference in which they are embedded, the situational context, and, above all, cognitive appraisals. Although thoughts frequently elicit emotions, the relationship between thoughts and emotions (as well as behaviours) is not unidirectional. According to Hofmann, the monitoring of emotions about emotions (*metaemotions*) and of thoughts about thoughts (*metacognitions*) helps to identify the patterns responsible for maintaining problems.

Emotion regulation begins in childhood through early attachment relationships, emerges within a social context, and integrates social standards and norms. Social support serves as a protective factor against psychological stress and contributes to emotional resilience in the face of adversity. A distinction can be made between intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation strategies (when individuals regulate their own emotions by seeking help from others) and extrinsic strategies (when individuals regulate the emotions of others), as well as dependent strategies (when regulation depends on a specific response from the other person) and independent strategies (when regulation does not require a particular response from the other or when the other cannot respond). As with intrapersonal strategies, interpersonal emotion regulation strategies can be adaptive when they protect against emotional stress, or maladaptive when they contribute to perpetuating the problem. Frequent reliance on interpersonal emotion regulation strategies may diminish an individual's sense of control over their own emotional experience and may become maladaptive if the individual becomes dependent on others to regulate their affect (Hofmann, 2018).

Intense Emotional Responses

In relation to the process of recalling highly emotionally charged events, coaches must bear in mind that memories (and their retrieval) may be limited, that the events brought into the session may not necessarily be the most relevant ones (as the high emotional intensity of the event may reduce its availability in memory), and that the emotion itself may later be reconstructed with new meanings that were not evident at the time. Therefore, it would seem prudent for coaches not to become attached to the emotionality associated with a single event but rather to take multiple events into account over a period of time. Moreover, repeatedly focusing on a single event could reinforce the coachee's potentially distorted perception of the emotionally charged experience (Duffell & Lawton Smith, 2015).

Latent Emotions

According to Hofmann (2018), repressing emotional material is typically a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy that renders the content more intrusive and persistent. Adopting an attitude of acceptance toward emerging emotions (without attempting to change or avoid them) is associated with greater resilience in challenging situations and a reduction in subjective distress. Reappraisal is the intrapersonal emotion regulation strategy most likely to be adaptive.

Emotion and Affect

Feelings and emotions exert a powerful influence on reason and may either enhance or impair reasoning and decision-making. Emotions help narrow down the range of possible options by rapidly and preconsciously evaluating stimuli as beneficial or harmful, provide information about our reactions to situations, and facilitate rapid responses that support survival. Exploring our emotions grants us access to the evaluations we make of a given situation, as well as information about the needs and goals operating at any given moment. Moreover, emotions communicate information to others about our intentions and readiness to act. In interpersonal relationships, the ongoing expression and perception of emotional states substantially informs and regulates interaction (Greenberg & Paivio, 2000).

Affect and emotion are closely related constructs and are often used interchangeably. Affect refers to the subjective experience of an emotional state, determining its valence (positive/pleasant or negative/unpleasant). Emotion is a multidimensional construct that, in addition to affective experience, includes motivational tendencies and contextual and cultural factors, resulting in a complex experience that can be regulated to some extent through intra- and interpersonal processes. Just as cognitive schemas can give rise to maladaptive thoughts, certain forms of emotion management (affective styles) may also be maladaptive if they lead to excessive distress or behavioural problems. Positive and negative affect are mutually inhibitory. Positive affect reduces the impact of negative affect on the individual while simultaneously broadening behavioural repertoires by enhancing physical, social, and intellectual resources, as well as exerting an inhibitory effect on emotional disorders. Dysregulation of negative affect is one of the causes of emotional disorders. The first step in treating emotional disorders is to understand the function that emotions serve in a person's life (Hofmann, 2018).

Emotional Coping Strategies

Gross and John (2003) defined emotion regulation as the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them. Coping is defined as the cognitive and behavioural effort to manage stressors. Lazarus conceptualises stress as a dynamic transaction between the person and the environment that is appraised as exceeding the individual's resources and threatening their well-being. What renders a situation stressful is the subjective appraisal and the beliefs surrounding one's own capacity to access adequate coping strategies. Maladaptation is not a direct consequence of stress, but rather results from the interaction between the environment and the individual's vulnerabilities and available resources. These

individual variables determine a person's coping style, that is, the habitual way in which they respond to stress (Hofmann, 2018).

The Coach's Emotional Management

According to Grant (2003; cited in Chapman, 2005), what distinguishes competent coaches is the possession of three metacompetencies: rational intelligence (the ability to conceptualise, reason, identify the core issues, and adopt a meta-perspective); systemic intelligence (the capacity to understand how individuals and systems function, adapt, and change); and emotional intelligence (self-awareness and awareness of others, cognitive and emotional flexibility, and the use of emotions to set and achieve goals).

Cox (2016) identified a polarised view of emotions among coaching professionals (either as a useful resource and source of motivation, or as a source of problems) and distinguished three ways of perceiving them: 1) emotions represent a client problem that requires additional intervention by the coach; 2) emotions are normal and inevitable and do not require control, but they warrant attention in order to understand what they signal, in the same way that behaviours do; 3) emotions are positive indicators of important progress in the coaching process, and the coach therefore facilitates their full expression and uses them productively to motivate the client. Coaches often experience difficulties when confronted with visible manifestations of coachees' emotions, particularly those that generate discomfort or a "bad feeling." According to these authors, the coach's emotion regulation exerts a decisive influence on the coachees' subsequent emotional experiences.

METHODOLOGY

The Working Group (WG) determined that it would employ purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) with a sample of 30 accredited professionals in Coaching Psychology registered with the COPC, each of whom was invited to participate in an individual semi-structured interview.

Once the candidates had been selected, the WG contacted each of them to provide information about the aims and scope of the study and to invite them to participate, providing in advance both the interview questions and the informed consent form. The informed consent form outlined the purpose of the study, the methodology and procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, and issues of confidentiality. With regard to the latter, participants were asked for permission to record the interview (to increase the rigour of transcription and allow the interviewer to concentrate fully on the interaction), to allow the citation of excerpts with anonymity guaranteed, and, if they so wished, to provide explicit consent for their name to be mentioned in the study as having participated.

The interview questions were agreed upon by the WG and piloted internally, with members interviewing one another in order to assess whether the wording was effective in eliciting the desired information efficiently and consistently..

Following completion of the pilot and the necessary adjustments, the WG proceeded to conduct the interviews with the 30 participants. Subsequently, the data were analysed through reading, interpretation, and categorisation of the responses, adopting a primarily qualitative approach with occasional inclusion of quantitative data. Finally, the WG formulated the conclusions and drafted the final version of the study.

As for the demographic data of the sample, 70% of participants are women and 30% men. The age range is 29 to 64 years, with the median age of women being 53 years and that of men 56 years. Regarding their university education in psychology, 70% hold a bachelor's degree, 17% a master's degree, and the remaining 13% a doctorate. The average length of professional experience is 13 years, ranging from 5 to 30 years, with a total cumulative experience of 402 years.

RESULTS

Question 1

Which coaching approaches and psychological frameworks do you follow?

“I follow several, and depending on the coachee and the issue at hand, I use one or another.”

The findings indicate that most interviewees rely on multiple frameworks and approaches. Participants mentioned as many as 31 different ones. 20% of participants reported using a single model in their Coaching Psychology sessions, while the remaining 80% of participants reported drawing on two or more.

The approaches most frequently mentioned by participants were systemic (50%), cognitive-behavioural (33%), NLP (33%), ontological (30%), psychodynamic (27%), Gestalt (20%), strategic (17%), humanistic (17%), integrative (13%), and co-active (10%).

It was also observed that, in addition to coaching approaches and psychological frameworks, some participants included in their responses elements such as methods, tools, or techniques.

“Well, a bit of everything; I do not stick to just one. I combine the approach I manage best with what the coachee most needs at that moment.”

Question 2

What role do emotions play in coaching processes?

“Emotions are key in coaching processes because they are the starting point from which the client moves toward their goal.”

All participants (100%) agreed on the essential role of emotions. 20% justified this importance by considering life itself as a continuous management of emotions, arguing that we are emotional beings and that emotions are present in all our interactions.

17% directly linked emotion with action, another 17% with goals, 13% of participants with change, 10% of participants with awareness, 3% of participants with motivation, and another 3% of participants placed emotions at the same level as thought and behaviour.

Furthermore, 25% of interviewees differentiated between emotions according to whether they hindered or facilitated the change process. The former were described as “blocking” or “limiting,”

while the latter were characterised as “enhancing,” “empowering,” “activating,” or “resource-connecting.”

“It is key to work from emotions. When a person begins to develop awareness of their emotions, that is when they can start considering change.”

Question 3

In what ways do you view the coachee’s emotions as facilitators of change?

“Emotions can be powerful allies in the coaching process, acting as levers that facilitate change or transformation.”

Analysis of the responses reveals that emotion plays a highly significant role in the process of change. Interviewees stated that emotions can be facilitators when they are positive: they serve as levers for the achievement of action. Conversely, there was agreement that negative emotions obstruct the process (fear being frequently cited as an example) and must be transformed in order to achieve optimal management.

Responses also suggested that when change does not involve emotions and is insufficiently managed, it tends to be short-lived. While we are a “whole,” each individual tends to have a preferred channel, whether emotional, rational, or behavioural. Alignment is needed between what a person feels, thinks, and does. Emotion is essential: without it there is no process. However, it must also be acknowledged that thoughts, beliefs, and values are interconnected with emotions, and at times these connections may be maladaptive.

With respect to interventions, interviewees emphasised the importance of becoming aware of the emotion being experienced, identifying it, naming it, and clarifying the desired direction (goal). One may hold a clear cognition, but without emotional processing action does not occur.

The participants’ assessment of the importance of managing emotions for the success of the process was consistently high. The lowest rating was 7 out of 10 (reported by 10% of interviewees). 40% of participants rated it between 8 and 9. The remaining 50% of participants considered it vital, assigning it the maximum score of 10.

“The idea is to work from feeling, doing, and thinking, and not fragment these dimensions.”

Question 4

How do you identify, manage, and facilitate the expression of the coachee's emotions during the session?

“Sometimes people come to coaching as an alternative to psychotherapy, and the emotional dimension frightens them.”

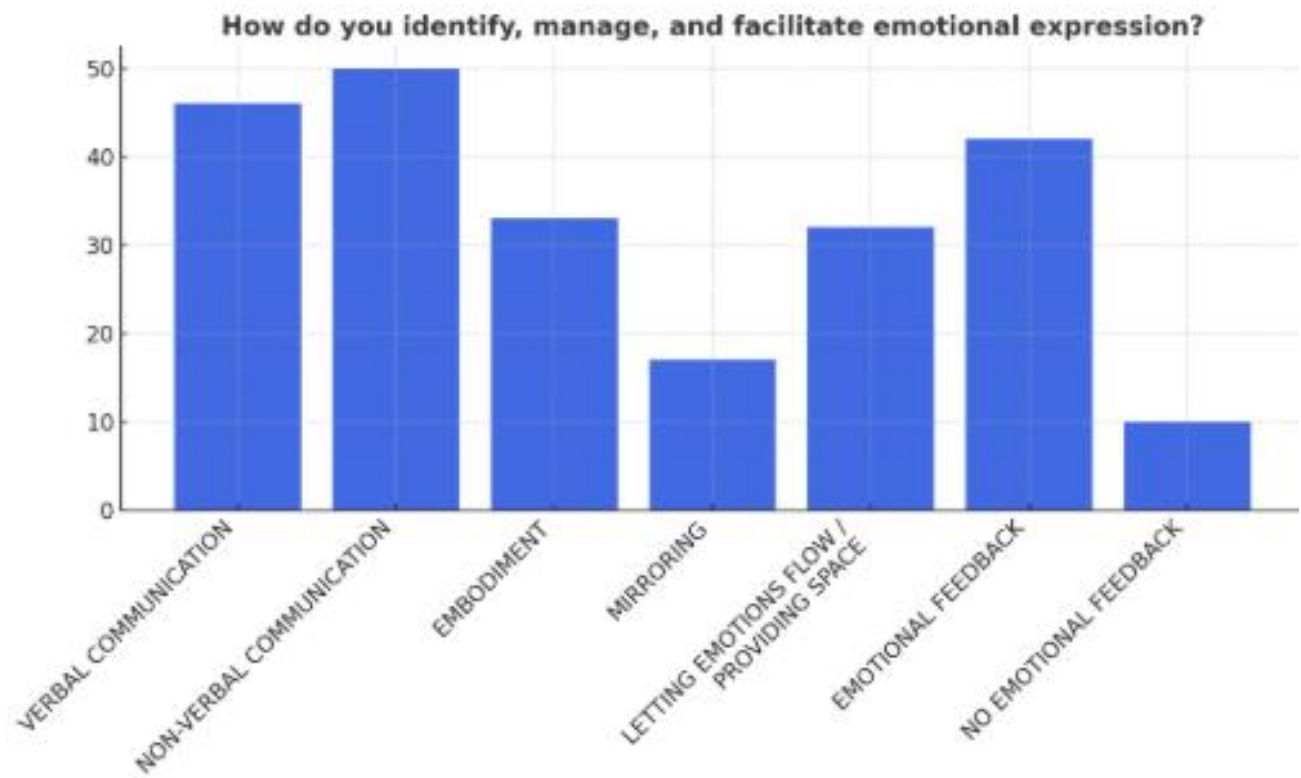
All interviewees agreed on the importance of identifying the emotions that coachees bring into the session, in order to consider the consequences of their emotional state and to focus the session on their needs.

The most frequently used tool for assessing the coachee's mood is observation; non-verbal communication provides abundant information, including posture, movements, gestures, tone of voice, and breathing. Verbal communication, language, and questioning are also used to assess the coachee's awareness of their own emotions.

Most participants in the study reported that psychoeducation is important, helping coachees recognise their emotions. They often employ techniques to make emotions present, such as mirroring or establishing rapport, so that the coachee can identify with them.

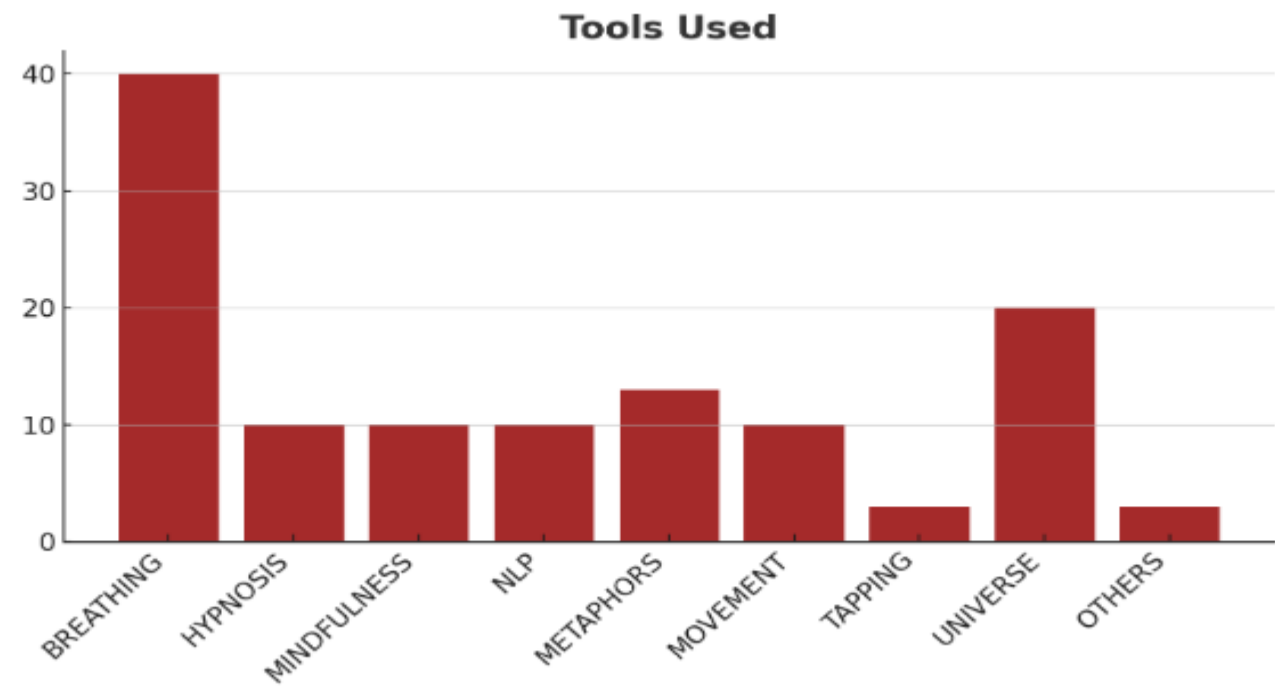
43% of interviewees referred to providing emotional feedback, that is, sharing what the Coaching Psychologist perceives about the coachee's emotional state, as well as emphasising the importance of giving space and allowing expression.. However, there was some discrepancy on this point: 10% of participants argued that providing emotional feedback risks conditioning the coachee to acknowledge the emotion described by the coach, and that it is preferable to intervene less, observe, and allow the process to unfold.

Many Coaching Psychologists also highlighted the importance of embodying the emotion, locating it in the body, and reported using tools such as focusing, relaxation, or movement exercises.



Some psychologist-coaches, in order to fully identify the emotions that are emerging, present coachees with an emotion map (such as Rafael Bisquerra’s emotion constellations) to determine both the specific emotion and the constellation of related emotions surrounding it. Others employ metaphors to help the coachee recognise and articulate how they are feeling.

Once the emotions have been identified, some psychologist-coaches apply emotion regulation techniques to facilitate emotional release, such as relaxation, mindfulness, Ericksonian hypnosis, or tapping (Emotional Freedom Technique). Several interviewees also reported using Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) to attend to the modality that predominates in the individual—visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.



As the coaching session unfolds, emotionality may evolve, and it is important to attend to the subtle signals that shape the course of the intervention and reveal those issues that carry significant emotional impact for the coachee.

“I work with the energy of the emotion and with the message that the emotion conveys.”

Question 5

How do you link the emotions expressed during sessions to the coachee’s values and beliefs?

“There is a belief and a value behind every emotion.”

All participants agreed that there is a connection between emotions, beliefs, and values. They noted that emotions can be analysed more directly than values and beliefs, as the latter operate at a deeper level.

Participants reported linking emotions with values and beliefs in different ways:

- 29% connected emotions with values and beliefs to raise awareness.
- 26% linked emotions exclusively to beliefs (“Emotions are a synthesis-based expression of beliefs”).

- 17% linked emotions exclusively to values (“Each value entails a set of representations, whether emotional and behavioural”).
- 10% focused solely on managing emotions.
- 10% stated that values directly influence beliefs (“Values feed beliefs”).
- 7% explained that depending on the coachee, they would address emotions, values, or beliefs.

The tools used by participants to explore relationships among values, beliefs, and emotions included: the ladder of inference, Dolan’s *The Value of Values*, the pyramid of neurological levels, the 4Rs of emotional ecology, and thought record tables (situation, automatic thought, emotion, behaviour, and alternative thought).

“You are either doing it or you are not; if you are acting against your beliefs and values, the resulting emotion is negative.”

Question 6

How do you link emotions expressed during the sessions with the coachee’s educational and sociocultural background?

“It has a lot to do with education, not academic education but what was received in childhood—family environment, the emotional education received in the early years or during adolescence. Some emotions are even related to gender.”

Responses to this question revealed considerable diversity of opinion. Even among those who agreed that emotions expressed are related to the coachee’s educational and sociocultural background, the concepts were interpreted in different ways.

60% of participants reported linking emotions to educational and sociocultural background, while 40% did not. Among the 60%, most did so in general terms, without specifying how. Some associated emotions with family learning processes: beliefs, upbringing, family environment, and parental mandates. Others highlighted connections with emotional education, gender, or family education.

Among the 40% who did not make such a connection, some referred to the universality or cross-cutting nature of emotional expression, while others pointed to its relationship with socioeconomic status, language, or self-control.

“Whether they come from a very high or a very low cultural background, I would say that the expression of emotions is fairly cross-cutting. I do not see much difference.”

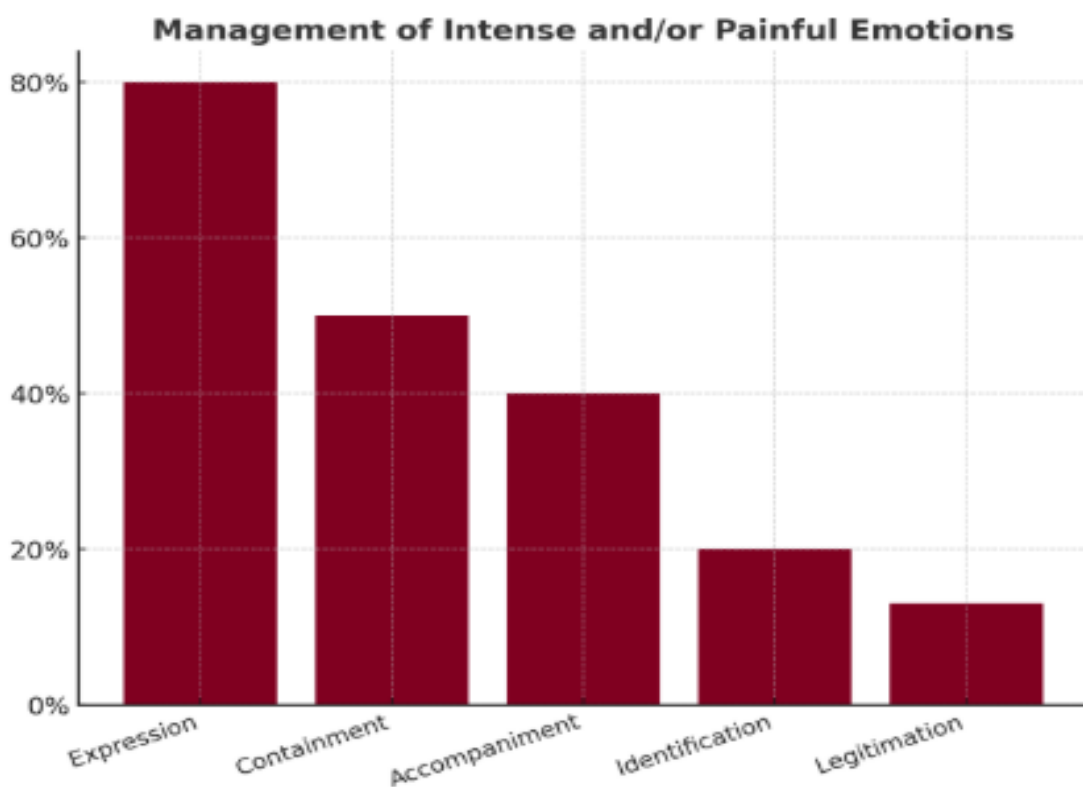
Question 7

How do you manage the coachee's intense and/or painful emotional responses during sessions?

"First I give space for the person to explain, to decompress, and then I work with the emotion accordingly."

The findings indicate that participants draw on one or several strategies to manage intense and/or painful emotions, using a range of techniques. Specifically, they referred to:

- “Free expression—oral, bodily, and written”, reported by 80% of participants. In this respect, some referred to deferred expression through projective techniques.
- “Containment”, reported by 50% of participants. Techniques mentioned in this category included mindfulness, relaxation, movement, embodiment of emotion, paraphrasing, rapport, verbal illustrations, metaphor, tapping, humour, and others.
- “Accompaniment”, reported by 40% of participants. This involved facilitating the coachee’s expression of their own emotion with the support of the coach (e.g., verbal responses, eye contact, or physical contact).
- “Identification”, reported by 20% of participants. Techniques mentioned here included labelling, emotion thermometer, the elevator technique, and embodiment of emotion.
- “Legitimation”, reported by 13% of participants.



The three emotions most frequently described as the most difficult for coaches to manage were, first and most prominently, anger, followed by sadness and fear. Other emotions identified as challenging to manage included helplessness, apathy, hopelessness, euphoria, anxiety, distress, guilt, jealousy, shame, and complacency.

“All aspects of emotional expression are genuine and subjective; they depend on the person’s mental, emotional, and bodily model. [...] Each individual is unique, and this is stimulating. It is a process of continuous learning.”

Question 8

How do you identify and manage the coachee’s latent (non-manifest) emotions?

“There are always signs. The questions are key, as long as there is a climate of trust.”

Regarding the identification of latent emotions:

- 27% identify latent emotions by jointly observing feeling, thinking, and doing: thoughts, types of words, slips, silences, tone of voice, body posture, and gaze.
- 27% identify latent emotions solely from verbal listening/observation: personal history, metaphors, stories, characters, narrative, laser questions, and feedback.
- 17% perceive latent emotions exclusively through intuition: mental images, floating attention, emotional feedback.
- 13% perceive latent emotions solely through body observation.
- 7% use other tools, such as projective tests.
- 5% disregard identifying latent emotions, as nothing related to them is explicitly required in the process goal.
- The remaining 4% gave no answer.

Regarding the management of latent emotions:

- 47% manage them through strategic dialogue, in a safe and trusting space.
- 34% work on latent emotions using tools such as metaphors, personal biography, stories, historical characters, the chain of laser questions, symbolic play, Bisquerra’s map, or family constellations.

- 10% bring latent emotions to the surface through bodywork.
- 5% disregard managing latent emotions, as nothing related to them is explicitly required in the process goal.
- The remaining 4% gave no answer.

"When you have scanned yourself emotionally, it is easier to recognize it in others."

Question 9

What distinction do you make between emotions, feelings, and moods, and what influence does this distinction have on the process?

"Emotion would be the totality of everything."

Once the responses had been analysed and categorised, it became evident that distinctions among emotions, feelings, and moods in the practice of Coaching Psychologists were highly heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory. This is not surprising, as there is no consensual definition of these terms. Based on participants' responses, it can also be noted that, in general, such distinctions are not explicitly addressed during sessions, although most participants considered them important for the achievement of goals.

The responses were distributed as follows:

70% differentiated emotions, feelings, and moods according to durability and intensity.

47% perceived a cognitive component as connecting emotions, feelings, and moods.

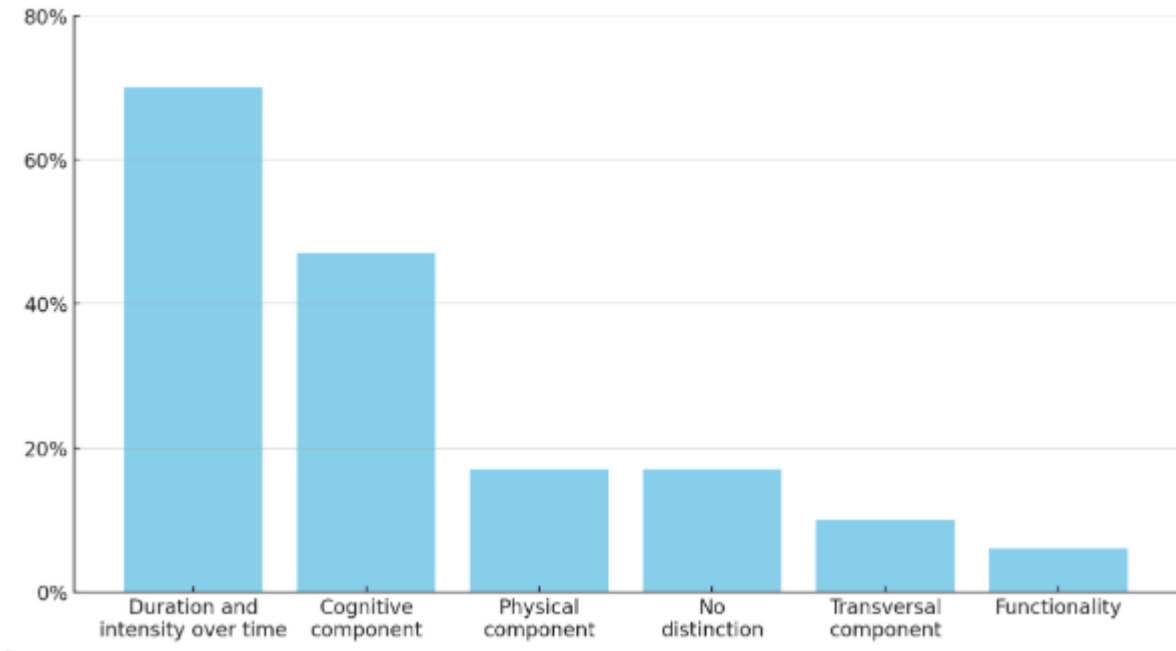
17% attributed the differentiation between emotions, feelings, and moods to a physical component.

17% made no distinction.

10% considered emotions, feelings, and moods to share a transversal component.

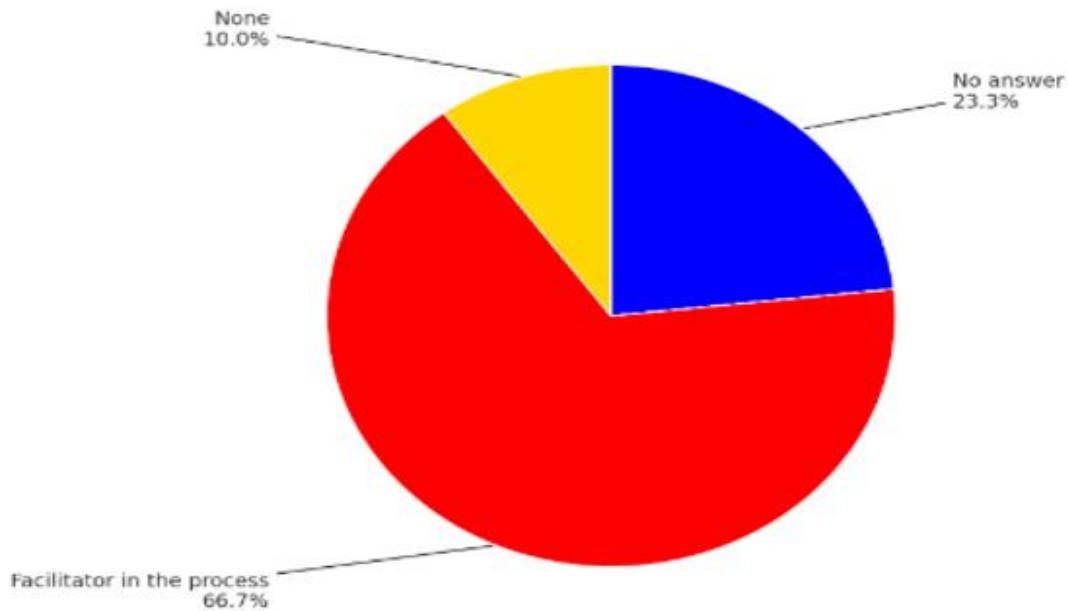
6% distinguished them according to functionality.

What distinction do you make between emotions, feelings, and moods?



With regard to the influence of this distinction in the process, 67% of participants considered that it facilitates the process, 23% did not respond, and the remaining 10% believed that it has no influence.

What influence does the distinction between emotions, feelings, and moods have on the process?



“We need to have emotions, and we should understand that emotions serve a function: when faced with a circumstance, we experience an emotion in order to enact a behaviour.”

Question 10

How do you address the coachee's emotional overflow, overload, and blockage?

“I believe that each of us, as individuals, needs to use different strategies (...) when the coachee arrives already emotionally overloaded, conversation helps a great deal; therefore, attentive listening (...) and trying to follow their pace.”

33% of participants described specific tools or techniques for each of the situations mentioned in the question, while 67% did not differentiate explicitly between tools.

The main strategies reported for addressing emotional overflow, overload, and blockage were mindfulness, relaxation, drawing, bodily expression, and thought records. Other techniques mentioned less frequently included reframing, positive thinking, humour, strategic dialogue, verbal expression of emotions, narration, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats, anchoring, change levers, belief attribution, visualisation, tapping, focusing, hypnosis, physical contact, Wingwave, and the use of Playmobil figures.

Some participants noted differences in how they work with overflow, overload, and emotional blockage depending on the coaching context: individual, organisational, or sports coaching. For instance, the technique of anonymous written emptying was mentioned in team coaching; NLP strategies in individual coaching; and the “Estadi B” program [Program B-Stage], applied in sports coaching..

“Emotional aspects are fundamental in both psychotherapy and coaching, but emotional overflows are less frequent in coaching.”

Question 11

How do you manage your own emotions before, during, and after sessions?

“Before entering a session, I do two minutes of brief meditation to centre myself in the here and now.”

With regard to managing their own emotions before sessions, most participants (70%) reported engaging in relaxation or centring exercises to cultivate presence, such as breathing techniques, mindfulness, meditation, qigong, or emotional awareness. 3% reported taking distance, 7% reported doing nothing, and 20% did not respond.

During sessions, 30% of participants reported engaging in awareness practices to connect with their emotions and re-centre through breathing, observation, self-connection, or mindfulness; 30% did not respond; 27% reported creating a barrier to maintain distance between the client's emotions and their own; 10% expressed their emotions to the client; and 3% act as a mirror, an empty container [metaphorically referring to the coach's role of neutrality and receptivity].

After the sessions, 37% reported engaging in supervision to reflect on what had affected them emotionally; another 37% did not respond; 23% reported needing to disconnect (e.g., leaving 10 minutes between sessions, walking, practising qigong, or performing symbolic rituals such as placing their thoughts inside a box); and the remaining 3% reported doing nothing ("Once it's over, it's done!").

"It is true that we experience emotions before, during, and after [the sessions], and I must bring awareness to them... to process emotions. If I invite my clients to do so, I must also invite myself to allow them."

CONCLUSIONS

Coaching approaches and psychological frameworks

The results of the study indicate that only 20% of participants based their practice on a single approach (coaching approach/psychological framework), whereas the remaining 80% reported using two or more.

Considering the sample in its entirety (30 participants = 100%), we identified up to 31 different approaches. The most frequently used were systemic (50% of participants), cognitive-behavioural (33%), NLP (33%), ontological (30%), psychodynamic (27%), Gestalt (20%), strategic (17%), humanistic (17%), integrative (13%), and co-active (10%).

These findings suggest that Coaching Psychologists generally rely on more than one approach, selecting from a broad range of alternatives that they combine according to practical criteria and personal preferences.

The Role of Emotions in Coaching Processes

All participants agreed on the fundamental role of emotions in coaching processes. They linked emotions to varying degrees with aspects such as the continuous emotional regulation required in daily life, or with action, goals, change, awareness, and motivation—all of which are key elements in coaching processes.

Greenberg and Paivio (2000) go a step further, arguing that emotions establish the goals toward which cognitions and actions are directed, thereby making affect a crucial determinant of human behaviour.

This perspective on the central role of emotions in coaching processes coincides with the emerging view identified in recent years by Duffell and Lawton Smith (2015), which conceives emotions as valuable sources of information in the coaching process. Emotions serve a purpose and can therefore be regarded as intentional. The very fact that an emotion exists, and generates the desire to regulate it, can provide valuable insights in the coaching context and enhance the coachee's self-awareness.

Emotions as facilitators of change

A quarter of participants distinguished between emotions according to whether they hindered or activated the process of change. The former were described as “blocking” or “limiting,” whereas the latter were referred to as “enabling,” “empowering,” “activating,” or “resource-connecting.” Emotions thus play a highly significant role in the process of change, either as facilitators or inhibitors

depending on their valence. Negative emotions were seen as blocking the process and as requiring transformation in order to activate the actions that lead towards the goal.

During sessions, it was considered important to identify emotions, name them, and raise awareness of them. Conversely, if change does not involve emotions or is not adequately managed, it is incomplete and tends to be short-lived. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that emotions are interconnected with thoughts, beliefs, and values, which function as a whole.

These accounts are consistent with David's (2005) findings regarding the link between the coachee's negative feelings and their diminished problem-solving capacity, as well as the interdependence between emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. Emotions are essential components of human experience, and acknowledging their role in the process of change is a central element of meaningful coaching interventions (David, 2005).

The importance attributed to identifying, naming, and raising awareness of emotions also resonates with authors who argue that exploring emotions provides access to the appraisals individuals make of a given situation, as well as to the needs and goals operating at a given moment. Moreover, emotions communicate information to others about one's intentions and readiness to act (Greenberg & Paivio, 2000), which further reinforces and facilitates change.

Participants' ratings of the importance of managing emotions for the success of the process were very high. All interviewees rated it between 7 and 10 (with half of the sample rating it as 10). It may therefore be concluded that for professionals in Coaching Psychology, recognising and managing emotions is fundamental to the successful completion of a process.

Identification, management, and facilitation of the coachee's emotional expression

All participants agreed that it is important to identify the emotions with which the coachee enters the session in order to understand their emotional state and focus the session on their needs. Most reported that helping the coachee to recognise their emotions is essential, and they frequently use techniques to make them more salient. This perspective is aligned with Greenberg and Paivio (2000), who argue that emotions not only need to be activated but must also be brought into awareness, differentiated, reflected upon, and expressed in socially appropriate ways. Consciously experiencing the emotion in connection with the object that evokes it gives individuals greater control over their emotional responses and enables them to learn from them (Greenberg & Paivio, 2000).

The tools most commonly employed to assess the coachee's affective state were observation (both verbal and non-verbal communication), questioning, and emotional feedback. These strategies help coachees increase their awareness of their own emotions.

Nevertheless, a minority (10%) of participants believed that providing emotional feedback may condition the coachee to acknowledge the emotion described by the psychologist-coach. They argued that it may be preferable to intervene less, observe, and allow emotions to flow naturally. This perspective coincides with that of authors who emphasise that, as complex phenomena, emotions may not be adequately reflected in language. Inaccurate paraphrasing by the coach can influence subsequent interactions, as individuals may unconsciously seek to behave consistently with the descriptions they receive (Duffell & Lawton Smith, 2015).

Once emotions were identified, most Coaching Psychologists reported that, in addition to providing space for their expression, they employed emotional management tools such as relaxation techniques, mindfulness, focusing, Ericksonian hypnosis, or tapping. This approach is consistent with the importance, highlighted by various authors, of helping clients to develop an attitude of openness and acceptance toward their feelings and their changing nature. According to these authors, emotional regulation constitutes one of the most important tasks of personal and interpersonal development. They conclude that the ability to regulate emotions in contextually appropriate ways constitutes the ultimate criterion of health (Greenberg & Paivio, 2000).

Relationship between expressed emotions and the coachee's values and beliefs

All participants considered there to be a connection between the coachee's emotions and their beliefs and values. They reported that emotions can be accessed more directly, since beliefs and values operate at a deeper level.

However, this linkage takes different forms, such as that expressed by 29% of interviewees, who connect emotions with values and beliefs in order to raise awareness, or the 26% who link emotions exclusively with beliefs (e.g., *'Emotions are a synthesis-based expression of beliefs'*).

Emotions are not a direct consequence of an event or situation but rather of the corresponding cognitive appraisal. Furthermore, individuals who remain emotionally healthy in the face of adversity tend to exhibit a positive bias toward events, demonstrate optimism, and experience an illusion of control over the future outcomes (Hofmann, 2018). It might therefore be assumed that working with coachees' cognitive appraisals and cognitive biases could contribute to the success of coaching processes. This assumption, however, cannot be drawn from the present study and would require additional research.

In any case, it seems reasonable to assume that Coaching Psychologists are better positioned than professionals from other disciplines to manage the effects of potential cognitive distortions or the absence of a positive bias.

Relationship Between Expressed Emotions and the Coachee's Educational and Sociocultural Background

With regard to the relationship between the emotions expressed during sessions and the coachee's educational and sociocultural background, opinions were highly diverse. Sixty percent of participants stated that they link emotions to educational and sociocultural background, while the remaining 40% emphasised the universality or cross-cutting nature of emotional expression.

Of the 60% who reported such a link, most did so in general terms without specifying how. Some related emotions to family learning (beliefs, upbringing, environment, and family mandates), while others highlighted links with gender or emotional education. Additional participants connected educational and sociocultural background more directly with beliefs and values.

This relationship between emotions and educational and sociocultural background aligns with Hofmann's (2018) definition of emotion, which emphasises that it is shaped by contextual and cultural factors, and that emotional experiences depend on the frame of reference and situational context in which emotions are experienced.

Management of intense and/or painful emotional responses of the coachee

The study found that Coaching Psychologists employed one or more strategies to manage coachees' intense and/or painful emotions, drawing on a variety of techniques including free verbal, bodily, and written expression; accompaniment; containment; identification; and legitimisation.

The findings do not allow us to infer whether the Coaching Psychologists interviewed take into account that, in the process of recalling highly emotionally charged events, memories and their retrieval may be limited. Moreover, the events shared during the session may not be the most relevant, as the emotion itself may later be reconstructed with new meanings (Duffell & Lawton Smith, 2015).

The three emotions reported as most difficult for Coaching Psychologists to manage were, in order of prominence, anger, followed by sadness and fear. Other emotions identified as difficult to manage included helplessness, apathy, hopelessness, euphoria, anxiety, distress, guilt, jealousy, shame, and complacency.

Future research might investigate whether the way in which Coaching Psychologists manage coachees' intense and/or painful emotional responses could vary according to the domain of intervention. For example, in sports coaching, particular difficulties may arise in managing overwhelming joy or euphoria.

Identification and management of the coachee's latent emotions

Coaching Psychologists identify coachees' latent (non-manifest) emotions through the combined observation of their thinking, feeling, and behaviour; their verbal discourse; bodily observation; and through their own intuition.

With regard to the management of latent emotions, nearly half of the interviewees reported addressing them through strategic dialogue within a safe and trusting space. The remainder worked with latent emotions using tools such as metaphors and stories, or by means of bodily exercises.

In our view, the identification and management of latent emotions allow for the unveiling of emotional material that may be relevant to the success of the process. As noted earlier, and drawing on Hofmann (2018), repressing emotional material is generally a maladaptive emotional regulation strategy, making the content more intrusive and persistent. By contrast, adopting an attitude of acceptance toward arising emotions (without attempting to change or avoid them) is associated with greater resilience in challenging situations and with a reduction in subjective distress.

Distinction between emotions, feelings, and moods and their influence on the process

The distinction between emotions, feelings, and moods in Coaching Psychologists' practice proved to be highly heterogeneous and at times contradictory, likely because no consensual definition of these terms exists. In some cases, the distinction was made on the basis of duration and intensity. In others, participants suggested that there is a cognitive component that unites emotions, feelings, and moods.

The distinction between emotions, feelings, and moods is not made explicit during the sessions, although the majority consider it important for the achievement of objectives, and a significant proportion regard it as facilitating the process.

Management of the Coachee's Emotional Overflow, Overload, and Blockage

With regard to the coachee's emotional overflow, overload, and blockage, only 33% of participants mentioned specific tools or techniques for each of these situations.

Nevertheless, it can be concluded that Coaching Psychologists have at their disposal a wide variety of tools and techniques to address such situations (e.g., mindfulness, relaxation, drawing, bodily

expression, or thought records), in addition to relying on core competencies such as active listening, attunement, and respect for the client's pace. Some interviewees reported differences in how they address overflow, overload, and emotional blockage depending on the coaching context (e.g., personal, organisational, or sports coaching).

In addition, some participants noted that emotional overflow is less frequent in coaching than in psychotherapy, which may suggest a greater presence of positive affect. According to Hofmann (2018), positive affect reduces the influence of negative affect on the individual while simultaneously broadening their behavioural repertoire, enhancing physical, social, and intellectual resources, and exerting an inhibitory effect on emotional disorders.

Management of the Coach's Own Emotions Before, During, and After Sessions

As for the management of their own emotions before sessions, most Coaching Psychologists reported engaging in relaxation, centering, and mindfulness practices to foster presence in the here and now.

During sessions, some relied on breathing techniques or mindfulness, while others focused on creating distance from the coachee's emotions.

After sessions, some reported disconnecting (e.g., leaving a few minutes between sessions, walking, practicing Qi Gong, or engaging in a symbolic ritual), whereas others engaged in self-reflection or sought supervision.

In conclusion, Coaching Psychologists are aware of the challenges they face when exposed to visible manifestations of their coachees' emotions, and they recognise that their own emotional regulation exerts a decisive influence on the subsequent emotional experiences of the coachees (Cox, 2016).

Final Conclusions

Based on the responses provided by participants, it can be concluded that Coaching Psychology professionals use emotions as a valuable source of information for the development of sessions and regard the addressing of emotional aspects as a key factor for the success of the process (Cox & Bachkirova, 2007).

Coaching Psychologists also align with the perspective of Duffell and Lawton Smith (2015), insofar as they value the use of information conveyed by emotions for its intentional orientation toward the goal and for its contribution to enhancing the coachee's awareness.

Furthermore, from their responses it can be inferred that Coaching Psychology professionals place importance on the metacompetence of emotional intelligence (self- and other-awareness, cognitive

and emotional flexibility, and the use of emotions to set and achieve goals), identified by Grant (2003; cited in Chapman, 2005), alongside rational and systemic intelligence.

With regard to the polarised view of emotions (either as a useful resource and source of motivation or as a source of problems) identified by Cox (2016), we may conclude that, based on the data collected, Coaching Psychology professionals understand emotions as reliable indicators of significant progress within the coaching process. For this reason, they facilitate their full expression and make effective use of them to motivate the coachee.

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