Exploring coaching style preference through conversations about coaching and personality

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a mixed method study exploring coachees' perspectives on the impact and helpfulness of personality theory and assessments in applying different coaching styles. Participants included 20 individuals who had been coached in the past, of different nationalities and from various industries, who took part in both the qualitative and the quantitative studies. The following consistent themes emerged from the qualitative study: the importance of personality validity, the impact of the coaching relationship, the perceived effectiveness of coaching, reflecting on past experiences and moving forward toward the future, while the quantitative results showed that individuals with certain Big Five personality traits preferred certain coaching styles over others. The study provides preliminary insights for coaches seeking to apply personality theory and personality assessments in their coaching practices and may assist them to make informed decisions about the coaching style to adopt in order to improve coaching relationships and coaching effectiveness.

Keywords: *coaching; Big Five personality traits; coaching styles; coaches; trait-based personality assessments.*

Objectives

The study aimed to explore the application of trait-based personality theory and assessments in the coaching context as a means to enhance the coaching relationship by providing practical guidance for researchers and coaching practitioners. This study hopes to build on the existing body of research related to the use of trait-based personality theory and assessments in coaching relationships.

Introduction

A recent study found that the international coaching industry is worth more than $2 billion every year with just over half of the coaches globally working in the fields of executive, leadership and business coaching (ICF, 2016). The study established that coaches are experiencing an increase in the number of clients they see, the number of sessions they have and the fees they charge (ICF, 2016). The popularity of coaching as a learning approach or style can be explained by the fact that it is highly interactive, challenges the coachee to

take action and can be adapted to accommodate the coachee's natural traits, abilities and preferences (ICF, 2016).

Subsequent to its global popularity and effectiveness, coaching has become accepted by organisations as one of the most popular learning and development interventions (Hawkins & Turner, 2017). Coaching is typically used in occupational settings to enhance individual, team and organisational performance and to assist individuals to improve their learning agility, speed of onboarding, job satisfaction, adaptability, co-worker relationships and leadership skills (Williams & Offley, 2005).

The style applied by the coach in a coaching session and a coaching relationship has a major impact on the long-term success of coaching (MacLennan, 2017). Several studies have shown that coaches who can adapt their coaching style to the natural learning style and preferences of their coachees tend to have more successful coaching relationships (Bell, 2014; Blanton & Wasylyshyn, 2018). De Haan, Culpin and Curd (2011) found that coaches are perceived as being more helpful when they are focused on the needs of the coachee, as opposed to driving their own agenda or approach. However, the challenge that coaches face is that they do not always know which approach or style to use as they do not necessarily know from the outset which coaching style the coachee would prefer. This study hoped to highlight the importance of understanding a coachee's personality preferences before and/or during the coaching relationship in order to understand the best coaching style to adopt. The study also hoped to give practitioners insights into best practices associated with personality assessments in the coaching relationship and to build on the existing body of research that focuses on assessments in coaching and the respective coaching styles that are available.

Personality and learning styles
Studies consistently show that personality preference is strongly associated with learning style preference, as individuals learn quicker and more effectively when the style of learning is aligned to their natural inclinations and strengths (Komarraju, Karau, Schmeck, & Avdic, 2011). Several studies have explored the relationship between personality and preferred learning style (Li & Armstrong, 2015; Tlili, Essalmi, Jemni, & Chen, 2016). Learning styles represent enduring and stable approaches that individuals prefer to use for processing information and acquiring knowledge (Snyder, 2000). Komarraju et al. (2011), who adopted Schmeck, Ribich, and Ramanaiah's (1977) model of learning styles, found significant positive relationships between the Big Five personality traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness and the four learning styles of synthesis analysis, methodical study, fact retention and elaborative processing. Komarraju et al. (2011) also found that neuroticism was negatively associated with all four of the above-mentioned learning styles and that extraversion and openness to experience were positively associated with elaborative processing.

Other studies have found that individuals who tend to take a deep-processing approach to learning are more likely to be conscientious and extraverted (Furnham, 1992; Zhang, 2003), as well as emotionally stable (Geisler-Brenstein, Schmeck, & Hetherington, 1996). In turn, individuals who seem to experience high levels of anxiety prefer more structured and intuitive learning approaches (Zhang, 2003), whereas individuals who prefer a more relaxed and pragmatic learning approach tend to be more extraverted (Furnham, 1992). As learning style preference and personality traits appear to be closely associated, it is argued that associations would also exist between different styles of coaching and personality.

Personality and coaching
Although theories and assessments of personality are widely used throughout the employee lifecycle and in particular within the learning and development space, McDowall and Smewing (2009) found that not all coaches use personality theories and assessments in their coaching practices. Coaches who do not use psychometric assessments regularly as part of their practices cited lack of training in personality theories and assessments, as well as the lack of perceived effectiveness of the assessments in terms of providing adequate data, as the primary reasons for not using personality theories and assessments (McDowall & Smewing, 2009).

Personality plays an important role in shaping work-related behaviour such as problem-solving ability, learning orientation, productivity, job satisfaction and intention to leave (Burch & Anderson, 2008; Conte, Heffner, Roesch & Aasen, 2017; Judge & Zapata, 2015). Subsequently, personality

profiling can have a multitude of benefits in the workplace coaching relationship. Coaches have reported that the traditional approach to workplace coaching, which focuses on overcoming challenges such as skill shortages, performance issues, change initiatives and strategic objectives (Witherspoon & White, 1997), does not always provide an adequate path to sustainable behavioural change (McCormick & Burch, 2008).

Personality-focused coaching allows the coach to understand the coachee's primary behavioural needs, strengths, development areas and objectives, which then allows the coach to take a more focused approach to the coaching relationship (McCormick & Burch, 2008). To comprehend personality-focused coaching, it is vital to explore the nature of contemporary personality assessments and the research on the impact of personality–behaviour linkages on coaching effectiveness.

Personality types and traits
The most popular way of determining personality in the workplace is by means of self-report psychometric assessments (Saville, MacIver, Kurz, & Hopton, 2008). Scoular and Campbell (2007) state that psychometric assessments can add much value to the coaching relationship in terms of assisting the coach to understand the needs of the coachee and in turn assisting the coachee to develop greater self-awareness.

Personality-based workplace self-report psychometric assessments have expanded massively over available that supports the capabilities of these assessments in terms of predicting job performance, job role and organisational fit, leadership potential and individual training and development needs (Saville et al., 2008; Weiner & Greene, 2017). Two approaches to personality assessment are generally used in the occupational setting, namely, personality type-based assessments and personality trait-based assessments.

Most studies that have analysed the association between personality and coaching effectiveness have made use of the much-scrutinised type-based approach to personality assessment as opposed to the more valid and reliable trait-based personality assessment approach (De Haan et al., 2011; Palmer, & Whybrow, 2008; Scoular & Linley, 2006; Scoular & Campbell, 2007; Saville et al., 2008).

Personality can be conceptualised as the intra-individual structuring of experience and behaviour (Asendorpf, 2002). Therefore, personality type refers to individuals with similar intra-individual structures of their experience and behaviour (Asendorpf, 2002). However, research on type-based perspectives on personality have consistently pointed out that such a variable-centred approach may neglect an essential part of personality, namely, the development of traits in an individual (Allport, 1937; Block, 1995; Hampson, 2019; Mervielde & Asendorpf, 2000; Stern, 1911).

Although personality-type assessments have lost much of their appeal in most personality-related research studies and usage in occupational settings, as they are described as being too reductive, many practitioners, especially career counsellors and coaches, find them useful in the occupational setting to help coachees crystallise their comprehension of their own personalities (Gardner & Martinko, 1996; Hampson, 2019).

A type-based questionnaire that is still frequently used in coaching practice is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which is loosely based on the research of Carl Jung (Furnham, 1996; Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998). The MBTI categories are based on four dichotomies, namely, sensing (S) and intuition (N), feeling (F) and thinking (T), perceiving (P) and Judging (J), as well as extraversion (E) and introversion (I). The MBTI system further classifies 16 personality types based on a combination of the four dichotomies.

Personality theorists have consistently argued that trait-based personality tools are more valid for use in occupational settings as they believe that job requirements are more complex than specific types or "boxes" of personality (Block, 1995; Gardner & Martinko, 1996; Hampson, 2019; Saville et al., 2008). The Five Factor Model, or the Big-Five Factor Model of personality as it is commonly known, has been accepted as the most widely used taxonomy for studying the relationship between trait-based personality and work-related outcomes (Salgado & De Fruyt, 2017).

The Big Five Factor Model of personality emphasises individual personality traits and the differences between people as opposed to the similarities between people which can be seen with the type-based approach to personality (Digman, 2002). Scholars argue that the Big Five Factor Model of personality allows the practitioner to gain more detailed information about the client's personality and potential behaviour (Digman, 2002).

The primary factors of the Big Five Factor Model of personality include a) openness to experience; b) conscientiousness; c) extraversion (or interpersonal patterns); d) agreeableness; and e) neuroticism (emotional stability) (Costa & McCrae, 1992). It should be noted that certain scholars have criticised the trait-based researchers' pursuit of a universal scheme for personality such as the Big Five model, as scholars state that individual personality exists in the limitless multidimensional space (Hough & Ones, 2001; Mischel, 1981).

Most of the research that has been done on the use of personality in the coaching relationship has focused on the personality match between the coach and coachee and how it would influence the effectiveness of coaching. For example, Scoular and Linley (2006) found that (dis-)similarities between the personality types of the coach and coachee, as measured by the MBTI, had a significant impact on the perceived effectiveness of the coaching sessions. It was also established that a coach's personality style would either consciously or subconsciously affect their choice of coaching style, which would in turn affect the coachee's perceived effectiveness of the coaching experience. Boyce, Jackson and Neal (2010) found that the effectiveness of coaching was not necessarily dependent on the behavioural compatibility between the coach and coachee but rather on the style that the coach adopted toward the coaching relationship.

When using the Big Five personality traits questionnaire (Digman, 1990), Stewart, Palmer, Wilkin, and Kerrin (2008) found moderate positive relationships between conscientiousness, openness and emotional stability and perceived coaching style effectiveness.

Coaching styles

Owing to the growing popularity and the expansion of research within the field, several coaching styles have emerged over the past few years. Stober and Grant (2006) categorise the most popular approaches/styles of coaching into nine distinct categories as follows:

The humanist approach to coaching. This type of coaching applies the person-centred principles of Carl Rogers (1951,1959), which view positive transformation and self-actualisation as key motivators within the human psyche (Stober, 2006). This coaching approach attempts to use people's need to self-actualise in order to stimulate the coachee's inherent growth potential. This style of coaching builds on the core principles of psychotherapy by emphasising the coach–coachee relationship while suggesting that the relationship itself is key to stimulating growth. As the humanistic perspective requires the coach to take a holistic approach it challenges the coach to address all aspects of the coachee.

Behaviour-based approach to coaching. This approach attempts to recognise the complexity of the human psyche, as well as the environment in which the coachee finds him/herself, while attempting to facilitate practical change over psychological adjustments (Peterson, 2006). This approach to coaching challenges the coachee to take action in real-life situations, to look to the future and to create sustainable positive change. It emphasises the importance of personal development and continuous learning and, to a lesser degree, adopts a therapeutic approach to the coaching relationship.

Adult development approach to coaching. This coaching style has its roots in several constructivist-developmental theories which state that when coachees become more open and aware of their own authority and responsibility, they tend to become more goal-orientated, more tolerant and more structured in their own development, as well as their approach to themselves and society (Berger, 2006).

Cognitive approach toward coaching. This approach to coaching stems primarily from the idea that coaching needs to address the multiple complex facets of the individual, that is, it is fundamentally a cognitive process (Auerbach, 2006). This approach to coaching holds that a coachee's emotions and reactions are primarily a result of their cognitions, perceptions, interpretations, beliefs and mental state. It has its roots in cognitive therapy which assists clients to replace their derailing and incorrect thoughts with positive and accurate thoughts about themselves and their environments (Burns, 1980). When applying this approach to coaching, the coach challenges the coachee to change their negative and inaccurate thinking patterns (Auerbach, 2006).

Adult learning approach to coaching. This coaching style makes use of several adult learning theories which focus on deep learning and reflecting on experiences such as reflective practice (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1994) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Cox (2006) indicates that coaching

is very close to these learning approaches as it is based on goal-focused behaviour, self-learning and teaching the coachee to use previous experiences to overcome challenges. Gray (2005), in turn, states that to facilitate transformative learning, coachees need to be assisted to critically reflect on past experiences.

Positive psychology approach to coaching. This approach to coaching postulates that coaches should support coachees in identifying and building on their strengths to assist them to overcome challenges, experience greater satisfaction and have hope for the future (Kauffman, 2006). Positive psychology assists individuals to identify, prioritise and dwell on the positive things in their lives, as positive emotions allow individuals to readily access their cognitive and psychological resources which results in better performance (Kauffman, 2006). The positive psychology approach to coaching focuses primarily on general performance enhancement, changes in attitudes and perceptions and creating balance in different aspects of the coachee's life.

Adventure-based approach to coaching. Kemp (2006) maintains that there are similarities between coaching and adventure education, as both approaches to learning seek to push boundaries and challenge the status quo. Kemp (2006) further states that both coaching and adventure education start with an analysis of the learner's current state, define a desired outcome and then develop a way of achieving this outcome. Both coaching and adventure education involve the learner needing to accept some risk and ambiguity (e.g. psychological injury in coaching) in order to move to the edge of their physical or psychological comfort areas. Kemp (2006) states that growth takes place when people take risks and stretch themselves. The adventure-based approach to coaching accordingly asks the coachee to stretch themselves in either an emotional, a cognitive or even a physical way in order to stimulate growth and behavioural change (Kemp, 2006). The learning that takes place during the coaching adventure is defined and then applied in real-life settings.

Systemic approach to coaching. This approach to coaching assists the coachee to identify previously undefined patterns of behaviour and feedback in order to make positive changes in their lives (Cavanagh, 2006). The coachee is challenged to take a holistic view of their patterns of experiences and behaviours as different thoughts and feelings may be interlinked. The systemic approach to coaching acknowledges the fact that life is challenging, unpredictable and ambiguous and that goals can be achieved by making small changes and by being open to growth and creativity (Cavanagh, 2006). Growth takes place when the delicate balance between stability and instability is recognised and maintained (Cavanagh, 2006).

Goal-oriented approach to coaching. Coaches who apply this method assist coachees to develop and identify goals and action plans. The coach plays an integral part by stimulating ideas and actions and ensuring that these goals and actions are aligned to the coachee's values (Grant, 2006). This approach to coaching is also referred to as brief coaching as it sets out to achieve a very specific goal within a relatively short space of time (Berg & Szabo, 2005).

Palmer and Whybrow (2008) argue that most occupational coaches tend to either follow a mix of the above-mentioned approaches or take a positive psychology or a behaviour-based approach to coaching. Subsequently, this study focused on the positive psychology approach and behaviour-based approach to coaching.

Methods
Participants
Participants consisted of an opportunity sample of working adults from various industries and of different nationalities (Indian, Trinidadian, Irish, Ugandan, Syrian and Malaysian). A total of 20 individuals took part in the study all of whom had received some type of coaching in the past. Participants were informed of their rights to confidentiality and that their participation was voluntary before the research commenced and subsequently gave their written consent to taking part in the research.

Procedure
The research design consisted of a cross-sectional mixed method approach which made use of a survey (psychometric measure), followed by a face-to-face interview/feedback session to validate the results from the psychometric measure and to explore the respondents' opinions on personality and the respective coaching styles and, finally, participants were provided with a coaching scenario to determine their coaching style preference. There is wide agreement that mixing different types of research method can greatly improve the quality

of a study (Kumar, 2019). As all methods of data collection have limitations, the use of multiple research methods can counterbalance the disadvantages of certain methods (e.g., the detail of qualitative data can provide insights not available from general quantitative surveys) (Kumar, 2019).

Ethical considerations

Participants' rights to confidentiality were explained, and their informed consent to use the results for research purposes was attained before they took part in the research. Participants were also informed that their participation in the research was of their own free will and that they were allowed to opt-out at any time. The ethical committee of the researchers' affiliated university provided clearance for the study.

Psychometric tool

Rammstedt and John's (2007) self-report Big Five Inventory (BFI-10) was used to measure the Big Five personality traits of the participants. As Rammstedt and John (2007) found sufficient reliabilities for the measure it was deemed appropriate for use in the current study (average test-retest reliability of .72). When completing the BFI-10, respondents are asked to rate their preference regarding the way they see themselves on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Disagree Strongly" to "Agree Strongly". Examples of questions include: "I see myself as someone who is reserved" and "I see myself as someone who is generally trusting". The psychometric tool was administered in a face-to-face format by the researchers which allowed the participants to ask questions if necessary. Participants' rights to confidentiality were explained, and their informed consent to use the results for research purposes was attained before they took part in the research.

Face-to-face interview and psychometric validation

Furnham and Schofield's (1987) advice on the importance of providing feedback on a person's results after they have completed a personality questionnaire, in both research and practice, in order to validate the results was followed as part of the interview/feedback session. Interviews were transcribed verbatim.

The interviews were semi-structured, and participants were advised that they would last approx-

imately 30 minutes. The researchers prepared six questions as a framework for the interview/feedback session but allowed for a flexible response to the answers from participants:

Question 1. How would you describe your individual personality?
Question 2. Do you agree with the results of the personality questionnaire?
Question 3. Is it important for a coach to consider your personality during the coaching relationship?
Question 4. How would you describe your coaching experience?
Question 5. What did you enjoy about the coaching experience?
Question 6. What did you not enjoy about the coaching experience?

Open questions were used to encourage participants to respond freely using their own words without prompting from the researcher. Questions 1 and 2 were based on Furnham and Schofield's (1987) advice to validate the results of a personality questionnaire. Questions 3 to 6 were used to ascertain the individual's opinion on coaching and to gain insights regarding their coaching style preferences.

Research scenarios

After the completion of the psychometric measure and the interview, participants were provided with two written coaching scenarios to read through. A research scenarios or vignette is a powerful research method that can be used to measure participants' attitudes to certain topics or research variables (Hughes & Huby, 2012). It is, however, paramount that these scenarios are well constructed to allow the researcher an opportunity to clearly measure the respective constructs (Hughes & Huby, 2012). The first scenario adopted a positive psychology coaching approach, while in scenario 2 a cognitive behavioural approach was followed. In both of these scenarios, which were extracted from the rigorous research of Palmer and Whybrow (2008), participants were provided with the coachee's problem and key extracts from the coaching conversation. The outcome and coaching style used in the fictitious scenarios were not shared with the participants so as not to influence their thinking.

Table 1: Qualitative interview themes

Theme	Description
Personality validity	Accuracy of the personality psychometric tool used. Importance of personality in the learning/coaching experience.
Coaching relationship	Importance of working well with the coach.
Effectiveness of coaching	Coaching as an effective tool of learning.
Reflecting	Coaching allowing a person to reflect on past experiences.
Moving forward	Coaching helping someone to set goals and take actionable steps.

Analysis

Rammstedt and John's (2007) guidance on scoring the BFI 10 was followed in terms of calculating a participant's highest Big Five personality preferences based on how each item loaded on each of the Big Five personality scales. The mean scores of each of the Big Five personality traits were calculated to determine the predominant personality preferences for the sample.

The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis which is a rigorous qualitative data analysis method where interview transcripts are examined and classified in a highly structured way in order to identify patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The scenarios were analysis by asking participants which of the coaching styles in the scenarios they preferred and why, based on the coaching conversation extracts they were provided with. Coaching scenario 1 was coded as '1' and coaching scenario 2 was coded as '2', which allowed the researcher to conduct frequency analysis.

Results
Qualitative results

A systematic procedure was implemented to code and classify the qualitative data from the interview transcripts in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis. Themes from individual participant responses and across the entire data set were revised and refined. The data set was then reread to establish the validity of the emerging themes and to assess whether they were reflective of the entire data set. During this stage of the process, themes and subthemes were defined and refined further to determine which part of the data each theme represented. Five key themes emerged from the analysis: personality validity, the coaching relationship, effectiveness of coaching, reflecting and moving to the future. These themes were observed in the data obtained from all the research participants and are defined in the order of the frequency in which they occurred. Table 1 provides a summary of these themes.

Personality validity

After receiving feedback on their Big Five Personality trait results, as measured by the BF-10 (Rammstedt & John, 2007), and after asking interview questions 1, 2 and 3, all participants shared their opinions on their own personalities and how personality plays a role in the coaching relationship. All participants agreed with the results from the BF-10 (Rammstedt & John, 2007).

> … the results are very accurate … the tool describes what I am like most of the time … I agree with the results (D11-D13) … it was useful to learn more about myself (D6-D7) … I think personality is important to consider in any learning experience (F61-F66) … personality can show you or someone who is helping you what your natural strengths and development needs are (D6-D8).

Coaching relationship

All the participants indicated that the relationship with the coach plays a significant role in the effectiveness of coaching.

> … I need to like my coach so that I can feel it works (C23-C36) … My coach needs to understand me well for the

coaching to work well … As you are spending a lot of time with the coach, I think that it is important that you enjoy each other's company (A5-A9) … I need to feel that I can trust the coach with all of my obstacles and secrets (A3-A4).

Effectiveness of coaching
Diverse opinions on the effectiveness of coaching emerged from the data:

> … coaching works for some people, but does not work for others … not everyone understands coaching which may impact their willingness to be coached … some people prefer to learn through other things like classroom training (G3-G9) … coaching had a major impact on my effectiveness as manager … I would recommend coaching to anyone who wants to grow (H1-H3).

Reflecting
Many participants spoke about the fact that the coaching process allowed them to reflect on past events, decisions and situations.

> … it made me think about different ways that I could have approached the situation (B17-B19) … it made me think about using my past experiences and learnings to overcome challenges (B21-B22) … the coach asked me to reflect on my learning (I16-I19).

Moving forward
Participants highlighted the fact that coaching assisted them to look to the future and set specific goals.

> … my coach helped me to set goals for myself and my career … most of our conversations were focused on the future … I enjoyed talking about different possibilities (J7-J9) … my coach advised me to not dwell on the past, but rather to move forward … coaching helped me to make small changes to my life (K1-K3).

Quantitative results
The results of the BF-10 (Rammstedt & John, 2007) and the scenarios were placed in a frequency table to indicate which personality preferences most frequently aligned to which coaching style preferences. The frequency analysis consequently indicated that the majority of the sample were high on openness to experience (18 out of 20), conscientiousness (18 out of 20), extraversion (15 out of 20), agreeableness (18 out of 20) and neuroticism (11 out of 20). The majority of the sample preferred scenario 1 (11 out of 20) which adopted a positive psychology approach to coaching over scenario 2 (9 out of 20) which adopted a cognitive behavioural approach. Table 2 summarises the frequency analysis of personality preferences in relation to coaching style preferences.

The results of the frequency analysis showed that the majority of individuals who reported a high preference for openness preferred the positive psychology approach, while individuals who reported a low preference for openness reported preferring the cognitive behavioural approach. The same number of individuals who were high on conscientiousness reported a high preference for both the positive psychology approach and the cognitive behavioural approach. The majority of individuals who saw themselves as low on conscientiousness reported a high preference for the positive psychology approach. Further, the majority of individuals who were both high and low on extraversion preferred the cognitive behavioural approach. The majority of individuals who were high on agreeableness preferred the positive psychology approach while individuals low on agreeableness seemed to prefer the cognitive behavioural approach. In addition, individuals who reported high on neuroticism mostly preferred the positive psychology approach while individuals low on neuroticism mostly preferred the cognitive behavioural approach. It should be noted that no direct correlations or causation could be determined due to sample size between personality and coaching style preference. This was a key limitation to the study.

Discussion
The study aimed to provide preliminary insights on the validity and utility of using personality theory and assessments in the coaching process. It also highlighted the appreciation that coachees have

Table 2: Frequency analysis of personality preferences in relation to coaching style preferences

Personality preference	Coaching style preference	
	Positive psychology approach scenario	Cognitive behaviour approach scenario
High preference for openness (N=18)	F = 10	F = 8
Low preference for openness (N = 2)	F = 0	F = 2
High preference for conscientiousness (N = 18)	F = 9	F = 9
Low preference for conscientiousness (N = 2)	F = 2	F = 0
High preference for extraversion (N = 15)	F = 7	F = 8
Low preference for extraversion (N = 5)	F = 2	F = 3
High preference for agreeableness (N = 18)	F = 10	F = 8
Low preference for agreeableness (N = 2)	F = 0	F = 2
High preference for neuroticism (N = 11)	F = 9	F = 2
Low preference for neuroticism (N = 9)	F = 4	F = 5

F = Frequency

for coaching as a learning tool and more specifically for the coaching relationship. The importance of the coaching relationship and the style that the coach adopts during this relationship for the effectiveness of coaching was also found in this study (De Haan et al., 2011; MacLennan, 2017).

Reflecting on past experiences to facilitate self-insight has been found to be essential in terms of supporting personal growth (Augusttijnen, Schitzer, & Van Esbroeck, 2011). The current study showed that coaching is a powerful tool that can be used to facilitate growth as it allows individuals to reflect on past experiences. Moreover, the results supported previous research which found that learning and more specifically coaching is perceived as being more effective when specific goals and action steps are set for the future (Greif, 2016).

In this study, similar findings were made to those of previous studies which showed that personality plays an important role in individuals' learning style preferences (Komarraju et al., 2011; Li & Armstrong, 2015; Tlili et al., 2016). The importance of clearly understanding a coachee's personality traits before or during the coaching relationship was highlighted, as the study showed that particular personality traits may potentially prefer either the cognitive behavioural approach or the positive psychology approach to coaching. This finding is consistent with the work of Komarraju et al. (2011), who established clear associations between the Big Five personality factors and individuals' learning preferences, for example a preference for learning through deep cognitive processing and understanding (e.g. a cognitive behavioural approach to coaching) or through systematic goal setting (e.g. a positive psychology approach to coaching).

Stewart (2006) proposed that client, coaching, personality, and work environment factors are all associated with coaching success and the perceived relationship match between the coach and the coachee. Personality may impact on coaching success via moderating the influence of these variables. It should thus be noted that personality is not the only variable that may impact the outcomes of the coaching relationship and that several other variables should be taken into account to fully understand the dynamic relationship between coach and coachee.

Coaching practitioners could utilise the preliminary findings presented in this study to better prepare themselves for the coaching relationship. Coaches who take the time to assess their coachees'

preferred personality styles may be in a better position to alter their coaching styles in accordance with the needs and preferences of their coachees (Stewart et al., 2008). Knowledge on the coachee's personality preferences may also assist the coach in building a stronger coaching relationship with the coachee as they will know what the individual's behavioural and learning preferences, strengths and development needs are.

The relationships between the application component of coaching success and the studied personality variables may suggest that certain individuals could benefit from support interventions to encourage the successful implementation of development activities as a result of coaching. Stewart et al. (2008) advise that individuals who do not score highly on conscientiousness, openness, and emotional stability, may require further development interventions to assist them in finding their coaching relationship useful. Stewart (2006) developed a Coaching Transfer Facilitator Framework to guide such interventions. For example, this framework recommends the formation of a champion-client partnership for developmental action, in which the champion is someone senior to the coachee with an interest in the client's development. Future research could explore the relative effectiveness of development interventions across personality characteristics.

Limitations and areas for future research

Similar to other studies in the field of coaching this study was limited by a small sample size. This impeded the researchers' abilities to utilise advanced statistical analysis techniques in the quantitative analysis and the potential generalisability of the results. Participation in the study was voluntary which means that it could be argued that self-selected candidates view coaching in general as more positive and the results were enhanced as a consequence. The personality questionnaire that was used is dependent on participants' self-knowledge, hence low self-perceptions of the participants could also have skewed the results. Owing to time and resource limitations, the entire coaching relationship and dialogue could not be communicated via the scenarios that were used which meant that participants were not able to gain a full picture of the coaching styles that were used before they had to make a decision on their preferred scenario.

This study was positioned as a preliminary step in exploring the potential relationship between personality preferences and coaching style preferences. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples and various data gathering and statistical processing techniques and should potentially be longitudinal in design so that cause and effect may be established. Future research could also explore other coaching styles in relation to personality preferences as this study was limited to two coaching styles only.

Conclusion

As personality plays a significant role in the learning experience (Komarraju et al., 2011), this study proposed that coaching practitioners and researchers should consider paying more attention to the application of personality theory and assessments in coaching practices. It was argued that personality theory and data from trait-based personality assessments would provide the practitioner with valuable insights into the coachee's preferred coaching style, which would subsequently have a positive impact on the effectiveness of coaching. The study highlighted the fact that coachees experience coaching as more meaningful as a learning intervention when coaches adapt their coaching style to the coachee's natural personality preferences.

It should be noted that the current research was a preliminary study on the relationship dynamics that potentially exist between personality preference and coaching style preference. The results from this study could be used to guide further research in the field of coaching psychology.

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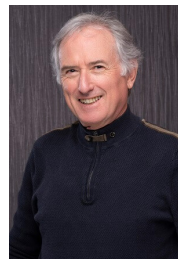
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