



'Vulnerable human interactions': Understanding relationships in group coaching for leaders working remotely during COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the significance of social connectedness in the workplace.

Existing group coaching literature has highlighted the importance of the group itself in advancing outcomes.

This qualitative study explored leaders' experiences of interpersonal relationships following participation in a four-week online group coaching intervention.

Introduction

As organizations consider ongoing remote working arrangements, a critical need exists to determine support mechanisms which strengthen connection and wellbeing in the workplace.

Group coaching is one medium organizations can adopt to enhance wellbeing and a sense of belonging which ripple beyond the clients¹.

Extant literature does not speak to the depth of the relational experiences within group coaching, despite acknowledging the significance the group contributes to learning² and wellbeing³.

Research Questions:

1. How do leaders experience interpersonal relationships within group coaching?
2. What meaning do participants derive from the relationships that are formed?
3. How do these relationships influence the participants' sense of self, wellbeing, and learning?

Methods



7 Participants [Mage = 38.86 years] | Formal Leaders
Living in Canada | Working Remotely due to COVID-19



Online group coaching intervention "Leading in a virtual world" with four 90-minute sessions



Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis from data gathered from semi-structured interviews

Results

"I feel a little bit more even more comfortable in my own skin, and having engaged with a group of people who received me as an equal and not a fraud." - P5



"I know that all of these other people are showing up for me because we said we were going to, and we all are in this together." - P4

"It's like very reinvigorating and it's almost it's like good for the soul. Like it seems like soul food almost, like it fills up my bar a bit." - P2

Developing Bonds

The experience of forming and being part of a group demonstrated similar and differing meanings for the participants:

- Fostering connections
- Positive group attributes
- Unity in group
- Yearning for more

To Be With Others

Participants reflected on the value of being with others through this journey:

- Positive emotional experiences
- 'I'm not alone'
- Collective experiences

A Supportive Atmosphere

The importance of a supportive atmosphere was a central element of participants' relationships with one another:

- Offering support to others
- Receiving support
- Witnessing support

Impact on Self & Leadership

The experience inspired several learnings and bolstered the participants' perceptions of self and other:

- Shifting sense of self
- Broadening awareness
- Catalyst for change
- Feeling strong

Conclusion

This research contributes to a growing body of evidence that relationships and the group itself are powerful in advancing learning and wellbeing in group coaching, particularly for those whose sense of connection and belonging have been impacted due to pandemic circumstances.

The results endorse an autonomous coach approach⁴, where the coach plays an essential role of promoting member interaction and a positive group climate⁵.

The results indicate promising associations with existing research on high-quality connections⁶ and positivity resonance⁷, both which could further elucidate the instrumental facets of group coaching.

Further Information
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Future Research

Larger scale studies which include increased ethnic diversity and multiple coaches.

Comparative studies of within- and multiple-organization groups, and between virtual and in-person modalities.

Selected References

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