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**COACHING AS A TOOL FOR INCREASING SELF-EFFICACY
WITH REGARD TO PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

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Abstract

The paper aims to present the results of our own research on the effectiveness of coaching for increasing self-efficacy in future professionals. The coaching series used the basic principles and tools of coaching. To assess the effect of coaching on raising self-efficacy in the context of the future profession in late adolescents at the threshold of adulthood, the Czech adaptation of General Self-Efficacy Scale by Ralf Schwarzer was used. Research has demonstrated the positive impact of coaching, especially experiential activities and visualization of the idea of an ideal outcome, on the conscious level of self-efficacy in future professionals not only in the field of professional orientation but also in the area of general self-efficacy. Based on the results, the respondents find coaching effective in the field of professional identity, particularly in increasing their self-confidence, courage to accept and achieve challenging goals, awareness and sense of responsibility towards their future profession, developing creativity, and adopting increasingly optimistic attitudes towards fulfilling tasks. No gender-based differences in the results were noticed.

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Keywords: Adolescence, adulthood, identity, self-efficacy, profession, coaching.



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1. Introduction

Coaching is currently considered a modern tool for the development of managers. The basic principles of coaching are following: partnership, goal awareness, support for self-confidence, objectivity, responsibility, proactive approach, cognitive processes and will, inner motivation and search for alternatives. These principles are very close to the concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is related to an individual's conviction about his or her ability to control events. We were interested in the impact of coaching on the self-efficacy of adolescents not only in the area of subjective vision. We focused our attention on the effect on the General Self-Efficacy Scale.

1.1. Coaching as a way to release the (hidden) potential of an individual

According Cipro (2015) and International Coach Federation (ICF) or Institute for Life Coach Training (ILCT), coaching is a professional relationship. They say, that coaching helps people deliver extraordinary results in their lives, careers and business. It represents a trusted relationship of development that helps the client take concrete steps to achieve his or her vision, goals or desire. Coaching uses exploration and self-discovery processes to build client's awareness and acceptance of responsibility through greater structure, support, and active feedback. The coaching process helps the client not only to precisely define goals, but also to achieve these goals faster and with greater efficiency. (Cipro, 2015)

According to Whitmore (2016) and Daňková, (2015) coaching releases the individual's potential and enables him or her to maximize his or her performance. Setting a coach therefore involves thinking about people not on the basis of their performance but in terms of their potential. The internal barrier that prevents individuals from using their potential is a low level of self-efficacy. Coaching in this context aims, among other things, to create and strengthen the self-confidence of the coached person. Coaching also initiates personality development with a view to increasing maturity for accomplishing tasks at the level of empowerment and development of skills and abilities, as well as increasing psychological maturity, which includes self-confidence, courage, motivation, sense of one's actions, willingness to take responsibility for a given job position or with a view to a particular profession (Haberleitner, Deistler, & Ungvari, 2016). It can be said that in relation to the concept of perceived self-efficacy, coaching contributes to raising the awareness of one's ability to influence the situation and it develops one's competence to solve problems.

1.2. Adolescence and emerging adulthood with respect to professional identity

Adolescence is defined across professional literature as a period between childhood and adulthood and as an independent and significant stage in the life and development of an individual. (Erikson, 2002; Macek, 2003; Taxová, 1987) The current concept of adolescence anticipates a longer developmental phase that also includes the period of puberty and prepuberty (cf. Čačka, 2000; Langmeier & Krejčířová, 2006; Macek, 2003; Příhoda, 1983; Řičan, 2014; Vágnerová, 2012). The adolescence is conceived as a stretch of life with three periods, each of which has its characteristic features that, on the one hand, differentiate them from one another, and on the other hand, allow us to get an insight into their mutual

context. In Czech conditions, Macek (2003) differentiates an early adolescence (10-13 years of age, whose predominant feature is sexual identity), middle adolescence (14-16 years, characterized by the search for personal identity) and late adolescence (17-20 years, when the aspect of social identity, or professional identity, becomes dominant).

Late adolescence in the final stage corresponds to the period of emerging adulthood, when the young person is, according to Arnett (2000), formally mature but does not feel that way. He or she does not perceive major existential problems, is not under the pressure of the environment and can freely experiment with the possibilities offered to him or her (Arnett, 2006). A lower level of material and psychological dependence on parents and a lower level of commitment makes it possible for him or her to get various experience in relationships and at work (Arnett, 2004).

Compared to a purely adolescent perception of work as a means of meeting one's current needs, an adult in the age of emerging adulthood strives, within the context of the development of professional identity, to build his or her career with a view of a life-long profession. Questions about what work is at the centre of his or her interest, which activities he or she likes, which profession seems satisfactory, take on significance (Mikauš, 2007). The stage of emerging adulthood also poses a controversy about one's own future, revision of one's ideas as well as skills and abilities towards a particular profession. Prospects for the future and the belief in oneself tend to be optimistic despite the mentioned questioning. We know from practice and can thus confirm Bandura's (1986) socio-cognitive perspective that the young person at the threshold of emerging adulthood has a considerable degree of proactivity, self-organization and self-awareness skills in relation to the dynamic interaction of his or her personality, behaviour and environment. Thus, he or she is aware of his or her own effectiveness, realizes it in practice, and reviews it according to the goals set.

1.3. Self-efficacy as part of a professional identity

Self-efficacy - the concept of perceived self-efficacy is related to an individual's conviction about his or her ability to control events - is associated, among other things, with the idea of coping with life events. The high expectations of one's own effectiveness correlate with the creation of optimistic attitudes, understanding tasks as challenges, aspiration to higher goals, persistence in their attainment, and resilience to partial failures. On the other hand, the low esteem of one's own effectiveness relates to psychological vulnerability, low self-esteem, and disbelief in achieving success. Self-efficacy can therefore be seen as the basis of self-fulfilling prophecy (What is self-efficacy, 2009). In this context, we consider it efficient to use in practice, for example in the personal and social development of future professionals, techniques that support the development of professional identity and raising one's self-efficacy.

2. Problem Statement

Coaching is currently considered a modern tool for the development of managers and has gradually become a vital part of working with people in the corporate sphere. This is due, among other

things, to current trends in managerial practice – the humanization of leadership, orientation to partnership and symmetric interpersonal relations (Cipro, 2015).

The basic principles of coaching, which we consider to be very close to the concept of self-efficacy, include, according to Cipro (2015), partnership, goal awareness, support for self-confidence, objectivity, responsibility, proactive approach, cognitive processes and will, inner motivation and search for alternatives. We have respected all these principles in coaching our clients who are currently being trained for their future career and at the same time are practicing in their assumed field in part-time jobs - they are therefore in real contact with their future profession. We were interested in the impact of coaching on the self-efficacy of our clients not only in the area of subjective vision. We focused our attention on the effect on the General Self-Efficacy Scale.

3. Research Questions

The research questions were formulated as follows:

- 3.1. What effect do respondents find in coaching in the context of raising their self-awareness?**
- 3.2. What is the measure of the coaching effect according to the Self-Efficacy Scale?**

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the research was to determine the influence of coaching on the self-efficacy of late adolescents on the threshold of emerging adulthood in the context of the development of their professional identity. The partial goals were 1) to determine the subjectively perceived coaching effect on the development of self-efficacy from the point of view of the study participants, and 2) to compare the results of the pre-test and the Self-Efficacy Scale post-test.

4.1. Criteria for selecting respondents, research file and research sample

A gender-based research sample of 20 respondents was deliberately selected from a research group of 50 late adolescents on the threshold of emerging adulthood. The following criteria were selected for this sample:

- Age category of emerging adulthood
- University education
- Contact with future profession (a part-time job, internship, etc.)
- The presence of a topic related to the assumed future profession
- Willingness to co-operate at the level of coaching approach for a minimum of 6 meetings in the coaching series

5. Research Methods

A mixed research design was chosen for the intended aim of research. Since we did not aspire to a flat assessment of reality, we used the quantitative approach (Hendl, 2015) as a tool for describing one of

the partial research goals (we compared the results of the pre-test and post-test). This approach served as a basis for further discussion done in the form of interview. On the other hand, we used the qualitative approach for its ability to uncover details and specific experiences of respondents (Miovský, 2009). The respondents' answers were recorded during the coaching series in a record sheet. For the detailed analysis, we used the first phase of the theory (Řiháček, Čermák, & Hytych, 2013) and then coded and categorized the acquired data.

The procedure within a coaching series was as follows. During the introductory session, we made a pre-test with the Czech adaptation of the Self-Efficacy Scale. Then we set a goal for the entire coaching series with the client. We made sure that the goal was set correctly - to really help the client get vision, inspiration and motivation to work. We used SMARTER to define the target in each particular area and create an emotional anchor. In all cases, we managed to determine challenging and at the same time motivating goals, positively and constructively formulated with a view to achieving them in a clear time horizon. In the second session, we set the path to the goal. For the client, this meant naming a series of general steps to reach the goal. We focused on providing the client with a clear idea of how the goal should be achieved so that he or she could plan effective actions – in this way a positive, structured and sufficiently broad path to the goal was created, which enabled the client to take advantage of new perspectives that were to help him or her find new procedures and solutions. Each subsequent session was dedicated to checking what had been done and providing feedback. We kept to these three areas and monitored: what was done/what happened, what it brought to/took from the client and how he or she can use it in the future. At the final session, the post-test was done, once again by means of the Czech adaptation of the Self-Efficacy Scale, and we and the client evaluated our mutual cooperation, its results and benefits. In order to deepen learning and getting new knowledge, each client was asked the following questions: Did you do during the sessions anything that surprised you? What was most demanding for you in this series? What could be the most significant breakthrough for you? What were decisive moments in coaching for you? What new features or strengths did you discover in yourself? What was the crucial insight you got in coaching? What would you like to praise yourself for? The questions were deliberately asked in a general way, without respect to professional identity. In this way, we managed to get feedback not only about the effect of coaching in a field of purely professional self-efficacy, but also gained an insight into the perceived positive influence on the general level of self-efficacy in ordinary life, for example on the level of interpersonal relationships or the ability to cope with difficult life situations.

Throughout our cooperation, we followed the ethical framework of research. Respondents were introduced to the research goals at the beginning, they were asked for consent with the utilization of this cooperation for research purposes, and assured that they could stop this cooperation at any time.

6. Findings

The quantitative part of the research revealed the positive effect of coaching on the level of self-efficacy in our research sample of late adolescents on the threshold of emerging adulthood. Comparing the research sample's results of the pre-test and the post-test showed an average one-point improvement on the four-point scale. On the issues of coping with difficult problems, the ability to stick to their

resolutions and achieve goals, the awareness of how to handle unexpected situations, the confidence in their own ability to effectively manage such situations, the ability to find solutions for almost every problem, to stay calm and rely on the ability to cope with difficulties, finding ideas for problem solving, inventing what could be done when encountering difficult situations, and responding to what is happening, 65% of respondents scored the maximum (4 points) in the post-test, and another 35% reflected that had the above mentioned capabilities to some extent (3 points). At the same time, they said in the interview that it applies to them in both professional and everyday life.

The qualitative data show that coaching has contributed to an increase in the respondents' confidence (see Category 1 *I believe in myself more*). The participants claimed that during the coaching series they become aware not only of their potential for their profession, but also of risks. At the same time, they understood how to eliminate these risks. The effect is that they do not consider discovering and naming these risks fatal now, they see them as a challenge to improve and increase their ability to cope with such situations. This is related to courage (see category 2 *I am more courageous*). Respondents now feel more willing to accept new and demanding tasks as challenges. The participants can see the reason for this partial change in realization that if they are able to formulate a goal clearly and set a constructive plan of activities to fulfil it, they can easily imagine achieving the goal and automatically put these activities into practice. A clear and achievable goal is, according to the respondents, one of the conditions of the sense of action. Category 3 *I know that I will be responsible within my profession* showed that coaching increases the respondents' awareness of responsibility and willingness to take responsibility for the demands of the future profession. An issue of motivation emerged as a significant topic. As can be seen from Category 4 *I am consciously looking forward to my profession*, in the period of late adolescence, young people are quite familiar with the specifics of their future profession as they tend to realize their motivation at the level of ideas through doing practice very similar to their future profession. In doing so, they also revise their subjectively perceived assumptions about performing their profession – and create real experience. Coaching has been instrumental in raising awareness of the client's potential and developing it in a particular practice. For this purpose, we used the timeline and neurological levels of values. Category 5 *I'm much more creative* can be considered interesting as the respondents stated that coaching for them was the source of their creativity development. They reflected that they were "naturally creative" during the coaching series and that they now perceive creativity much more as a conscious part of their potential. When asked about what aspect of creativity they have uncovered in themselves, they mentioned playfulness and the desire to experiment. In category 6 *I am more optimistic*, the participants emphasized the influence of the so-called +mode, used in coaching. Should we quantify it, then 60% of the respondents initially formulated the goal of the coaching series "negatively", which made it look like a problem. During observation, which was a routine part of the coaching work, researchers could observe changes in the participant's face when he or she managed to formulate the goal positively. From then on, the participant were able to formulate positively other partial goals, plan of action and individual steps. They reflected their increase in motivation and determination to achieve the goal if it was formulated positively on a scale.

Based on the above mentioned results, the respondents find coaching effective in the field of professional identity, particularly in increasing their self-confidence, courage to accept and achieve

challenging goals, awareness and sense of responsibility towards their future profession, developing creativity, and adopting increasingly optimistic attitudes towards fulfilling tasks.

The comparison of pre-test and post-test results of the Czech adaptation of Self-Efficacy Scale show the positive effect of coaching with regard to the optimistic self-esteem of the respondents, the effectiveness of their own actions and the perceived ability to deal with problems.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this contribution presents the results of research into coaching effectiveness in increasing self-efficacy in the area of professional identity. We find the coaching approach as effective and therefore suitable as a tool for raising self-esteem in future professionals. We are aware of the limits of this investigation. We perceive it as useful in any further studies, for example, to work with a larger research sample that would better enable differentiation according to occupational typology. One of the variants of the next step can be a more in-depth qualitative analysis, using a smaller number of respondents for a more consistent and in-depth analysis.

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