

Leadership Coaching: A Cross-cultural Exploration

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Many questions arise for the aspiring leadership coach. This article explores common questions particularly concerning potential growth, understanding, and measuring coaching value, identifying opportunities and challenges in the coaching industry, as well as the importance of having coaching experience, certification, and credentialing. The authors interviewed coaches from both Malaysia and North America to assess commonalities and differences. The results indicate there are diversified perspectives on coaching standards and practices within each country. The coaching profession has many opportunities as well as challenges. Emerging coaches should place emphasis on experience and knowledge, as coaching clients tend to place more importance on the coaches' experience, knowledge, and the value they obtain from the coaching activities when seeking a qualified coach.

Is coaching still a fad or a matter-of-fact? The 2012 International Federation of Coaches' (ICF) survey says the global coaching industry is now estimated at US \$1.979 billion revenue with 47,500 professionally trained coaches worldwide (ICF, 2012). The good news is the coaching trend is still growing in increasing fees, hours, clients, and revenues on both sides of the world. Table 1 is a snapshot comparing the coaching industry between North America and Asia based on ICF's 2012 survey:

Table 1.

Region	North America	Asia
Coaching revenue	US\$707 (35.7%)	US\$95m (7%).
Professionally trained coaches	15, 800 (33.2%)	3,300 (7.0%).
Growth Rate	23%.	29%

As aspiring coaches, we are interested in obtaining a clearer perspective of the coaching industry relating to the value coaching brings to organizations. We are keen to know the challenges and opportunities available for new coaches. Our interest inspired us to interview seven American

coaching practitioners; six via email and one via telephone. In Malaysia, we also conducted interviews with three Malaysian coaching practitioners; a Polish coach as well as an aspiring Polish coach residing in Malaysia. The interviews consisted of email interviews with the exception of a Skype interview. A profile of all interviewees is presented in Appendix A.

We focused our interview questions on potential growth, understanding and measuring of coaching values, as well as identifying opportunities and challenges in the coaching industry. We also explored the importance of having coaching experience, certification, and credentialing. We started the interviews on February 4th and finished on March 11th, 2015. The interview questions are listed in Appendix B, and the following report identifies the most common themes amongst participating coaches.

Opportunities for Coaches

“Coaching is growing at 23% in American and 29% in Asia” (ICF, 2012)

Interestingly, the general sentiments from the coaches of both sides of the world believe most of the people in their respective countries are not aware of coaching activities. The Malaysian coaches suggest introducing and promoting coaching presence by way of holding free-preview, coaching fair, collaborating in corporate social responsibilities, or offering mini-talks for the profit or non-profit organizations.

However, the coaches from America and Malaysia believe the coaching opportunities in both countries are considerably different. The American coaches, working in a relatively mature coaching industry, recognize occasions to establish a common standard to develop and standardize their profession. Further, Marcie Thomas (ACC, BCC, CCC), an Executive Director of the Christian Coaches Network International, believes she sees opportunities for coaching. “Coaching is trendy right now but ill-defined.” She adds “Coaching is trendy in that it is an effective modality that empowers and elicits results not typically experienced in advising, mentoring, or supervision. However, because of its adaptability and usefulness in various disciplines such as business, human resources, and psychology, coaching cannot yet be defined as a separate discipline.”

In contrast, the emerging Malaysian coaching sector sees coaching opportunities in terms of market penetration for widening the coaching segments. Dorota Zinkiewicz, an aspiring Polish coach residing in Malaysia, believes coaching may help managers in their decision-making as well as developing managers to be better leaders in leading the Gen Y and younger workforce. Simon Yap, an ICF-ACC sales capacity coach, agrees with Zinkiewicz’s observation that the emerging young workforce tends to favor a non-directive approach to learning and development. Yap also notices that coaching is increasingly becoming popular as a communication and living skills tools with working adults, young graduates, retirees, and housewives.

Coaching Values

“Coaching challenges the coachee to develop self-awareness and self-confidence, thus creating insights leading to new capacity in leadership development” – Kay Bower

Coaches from both sides of the world believe they contribute to the organizations' tangible values. These highlighted values can easily be remembered through the acronym SIDE:

- Strengthen bench strength
- Increase profit
- Decrease operational cost
- Enhance productivity
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The American coaches mention they also help in improving intangible benefits such as improving integrity, compassion, and commitment to the organization. Significantly, coaches create trust in the coachees. Kay Bower (PMP, MBTI, MP), an American qualified coach, points out that coaching challenges the coachee to develop self-awareness and self-confidence, thus creating insights leading to new capacity in leadership development. Kingston Lee, a Malaysian certified profession coach, adds that coaching impacts beyond work life in helping the executives cope with their personal life issues.

Coaching Challenges

“Coaches are calling themselves coaches but are not qualified” – Veronica Holcomb

Both the American and Malaysian coaches believe the coaching industry faces the challenges of coaching competency and creditability. They note that some people are practicing as coaches but they are not trained as coaches. Veronica Holcomb (MA, BCC) states “Coaches are calling themselves coaches but are not qualified.”

Michael Heah, the pioneer of coaching in Malaysia, states that many “Asian coaches tend to focus on getting the goal fast [rather] than spending a little more time on the process itself.” He stresses that a little more effort on the process could help to deliver bigger results for the client. On another matter, Heah, who is an ICF Master Certified Coach, believes “Practical coaching combines mentoring and consulting when the need arises. However, a good coach will know when this has to stop for coaching to take over.”

Several American coaches mirror Michael's opinions that culture influences the coaching concept and process. Blanche Wallace (DSL), an American director and coach, remarks: “Cultures and languages are the main roadblocks to obtaining global coaching reach as well as in understanding workforce diversity.”

Coaching as a Strategic Tool

“Coaching is a ‘United Nation’ approach that synergizes good leadership and management practices within local practices and adhering to global standards” – Kingston Lee

The American coaches interviewed unanimously agree that coaches need to present coaching services as a strategic proposition value to organizations, including providing a Return on Investment (ROI) on coaching. Lori Auten (ACC), CEO of a consulting group, also suggests coaches use research statistics, anecdotes, or testimonies to demonstrate ROI. Yap, agrees in using ROI to present coaching value proposition. Wallace adds, “Coaching is a strategic management

methodology. Coaches can offer coaching as a strategic tool to facilitate their global strategic and leadership development across their global branches.”

How do coaches assess value or ROI?

Both America and Malaysia coaches believe it is important to capture or measure the value coaching brings to the organization. Malgorzata Grabarczky, a Polish ICF-ACC residing in Malaysia, believes coaching adds value when it becomes part of the organizational culture. Even though all coaches agreed upon the importance of measuring the value of coaching, only a few coaches indicated that they do assess the value or ROI. Grabarczky measures coaching results using Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Coaching tools. On the other hand, Yap and Zinkiewicz recommend using the Kirkpatrick model or similar model for measuring the effectiveness of the coaching process for global organizations:

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{Business results x \% of the impact of the coaching}}{\text{Cost of the coaching}}$$

Furthermore, Grabarczky emphasizes that the type of assessment used depends on what type of coaching and to what levels. In addition to the type of assessment, several common themes emerged concerning what should be included in capturing the ROI for global organizations. This included topics such as:

- Improved individual performance
- Job satisfaction
- Retention
- Financial improvements
- Improved soft skills such as people interaction, conflict resolution, other skill development
- Personal, team, and organizational goal alignment
- Satisfaction with the coaching program.

What about Certification, Credentialing & Experience?

“Credentials are a means to prove you have met the standards of competency for the industry as a whole as compared to [certifications] distinct requirements of your training school, which vary greatly” – Marcie Thomas

Thomas provides an excellent summary of the difference between certification and credentialing to clarify the often ambiguous terms:

Certification	Credentials
Prepares you for a certain level of skill proficiency as defined by the school/program.	It is a voluntary process of validating knowledge, skills, and abilities beyond the scope of your coaching school.

Measures your skill development against school/program standards.	Uses standardized requirements for coaching skills proficiency.
Shows that you have satisfactorily met the requirements of your school/programs.	Measures your skill development against the industry standard.
Typically awarded at the school level when the student has met the requirements of the school; may or may not be recognized.	Are nationally recognized because they are awarded by a 3rd-party, unbiased.

In addition to the clarity of terms, the perspectives concerning the importance of holding some certification or credential varied across both American and Malaysian coaches. Some coaches think it is essential to have a coaching qualification, while others believe it is just an asset and experience is more vital.

Lee agrees stating, “It is very important if the coach wishes to increase his or her coaching rates. Further, having a coaching qualification assures the organizations they are hiring coaches who are professionally trained to coach and can deliver the expected coaching services.” Cathy Alford (MA, PCC), an American coach, affirms there is “no substitute” for coaches attaining professional training. Cathy adds, “Coaches should be held to a standard, as other professionals are, because our work with others requires certain core competencies that only develop through training and experience.” Thomas notes, “It is absolutely important if coaching is to be respected as an industry and as a skillset...common standards help clarify the industry and bring a level of self-regulation and ethics.”

On the other hand, some coaches do not find it important to hold a certification or a credential. Although Bower believes it is important, she states there is only “limited value to having a credential...as there is not yet a globally accepted standard credential” and many organizations do not ask if she holds credentials.

“It is more important to have a strong list of references who can vouch for one's coaching effectiveness” – Mary BigMountain, Leadership Coach and Air Force Pilot.

Coaches Holcomb and Zinkiewicz believe recommendations and networking are very important. Holcomb emphasizes “Certification and credentialing are not as important as skills in terms of getting results from your clients. However, they are important if you want to get hired. However, even more important for getting business are recommendations and networking. Here, one needs a strong track record for people to assign credibility to you.”

Yap thinks it is important for a coach to have a coaching qualification, but to a client, it does not matter. Yap states, “Adding value is more important to them; Clients tend to assume someone who claims himself as a coach is trained professionally and certified as a professional coach.”

Interestingly, many coaches seem to have a different viewpoint when asked about coaching certification, credentials, and experience from the client’s perspective. They all agreed that experience was an important factor to the client. However, certification or credential are dependent

on how ‘consumer-savvy the client is’, but many clients do not even ask about certification, as many people still do not even know what a coach is or does.

Is Coaching Profession for You?

As a growing and emerging industry, the coaching profession has many opportunities as well as challenges. We can deduce from these interviews that there are diversified perspectives on coaching standards and practices both within each country as well as internationally. This is an area the coaching industry will need to determine what, if any, proficiencies are viable for the coaching profession. As new coaches, we will also need to address the question of “what are the reasons for upholding coaching standards?” particularly when considering that many organizations or clients do not ask about credentials or certifications.

Coaching organizations, such as International Coaching Federation (ICF) and International Association of Coaching (IAC), are taking great strides to address these concerns and establish globalized competencies. It is vital to further research and address concerns of ambiguity such as terminologies, certifications, credentialing, and other competencies if hopes are to establish a globalized profession. Thus, new and emerging coaches may consider both local and global best practices, especially when coaching internationally.

At this point, it appears that coaching clients put more emphasis on their coaches’ experience, knowledge, and the value they obtain from the coaching activities. However, one thing remains clear for prospective coaches - experience providing valuable coaching to clients will help to establish one’s coaching practice. Nevertheless, new and emerging coaches should also consider placing emphasis on gaining professional coaching qualifications, as professional training will help coaches’ practice to become more professional and ethical in their coaching professionalism.

About the Authors

Amy Olson is a leadership coach and consultant with many years of leadership and management experience serving various industries such as education, government, non-profit, faith-based, and private corporations. She is a Doctor of Strategic Leadership from Regent University’s School of Business and Leadership and can be contacted at aolson003@nc.rr.com.

Janice Tan completed her doctorate in Strategic Leadership (majoring in Leadership Coaching) from Regent University in 2017. Her DSL Project is “The Right-Fit Leadership Coaching: Leveraging Western and Eastern Principles and Practices for Success.” It introduces the Diversity Coaching Model as the Right Fit Coaching Model, a balanced leadership coaching practice, using the Western way of explaining leadership coaching but utilizing Malaysia's cultural values and within the local cultural context.

The Diversity Coaching Model is a coaching tool to harmonize the diversity cultures, multi-generations workforce, multi-ethnicities, or group coaching the coachees bring into the coaching space. The diversity Coaching Model focuses on harmonizing values and transformational leadership. Dr Janice Tan can be reached at Janice@aliveconnection.com.my.

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Appendix A

Acknowledgement of Contributors

The authors of this article would like to acknowledge our interviewees' contribution to this article. We greatly appreciate them taking time off from their busy schedule to collaborate with us. Thank you! Author bios are presented represent the individual at the time of the interviews.

Dr. Blanche Wallace, Director, DSL Coaching Group

Dr. Blanche Wallace is a Leadership Coach and Director of the Dynamic Strategic Leadership (DSL) Coaching Group. She is a leadership consultant, conference speaker, and developer of an integrated coaching methodology referred to as Neuro-intelligent Coaching.SM For training or speaking engagements, contact Dr. Wallace at dslcoaching@gmail.com.

Cathy Alford, MA, PCC, Owner & President of LifeWorks Coaching

Cathy is a Leadership and Strengths Coach credentialed with the International Coach Federation and certified as a Gallup StrengthsFinder® coach. She works with individuals and teams to identify strengths, team dynamics and growth opportunities for success. She has taught Coach Training at Columbus State University and served in pharmaceutical sales management for over 23 years. She is a contributing author in the book, *Inspired Women Succeed* and the author of *If Only We Could Talk: 3 Simple Steps to Parent-Teen Conversations*.

Dorota Zinkiewicz is coach aspirant and is taking part in Certified Coaching Associate program. Zinkiewicz is planning to become professional coach within organization. She has 10 years previous experience in HR.

Dr. Kay M. Bower, PMP, MBTI, MP, Member, Christian Coaches Network International

Through Koinonia Coaching & Consulting, Dr. Bower works with pastors, church teams, nonprofit leadership and teams, and individuals to help them achieve God's purposes with excellence.

Kingston Lee Shiang Loong is a Certified Professional Coach (CPC) from Corporate Coach Academy. Lee is currently serving as Assistant Secretary (2014/2015) with MACC. Lee believes that coaching can help one to scale higher in all areas of life, community and for this country.

Lori Auten, CEO, Focus Consulting Group

Lori Auten is the CEO of Columbus, Georgia-based Focus Consulting Group, a firm that provides professional coaching, business consulting, group facilitation and leadership development. Ms.

Auten is an Associate Certified Coach through the International Coach Federation.

Marcie Thomas serves as the Executive Director of the Christian Coaches Network International and is a strong advocate for advancing the ideal of professional Christian coaching. Marcie is an ICF Associate Certified Coach, a Board Certified Coach through the Center for Education and Credentialing. She is also a Certified Christian Coach. She earned a BS with honors in Psychology. Marcie is a member of the International Coach Federation, the Institute of Coaching, the Institute of Coaching Professional Organization, and is the past Secretary for Maryland ICF Chapter. In addition, Marcie serves as the Pastor of Lenox Community Fellowship, a Full Gospel, non-denominational church in Lenox, Missouri.

Malgorzata Grabarczky is an executive coach and trainer. She is an ICF Associate Certified Coach, a Certified Executive/Leadership Coach of Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching and Business Trainer with more than 20 years of professional experience.

Marella Tobolt (Mary) Big Mountain, Doctorate in Applied Leadership (May 2015) from Regent University, Air Force Pilot and Leadership Coach. Marella Tobolt Big Mountain has coached at all leadership levels from executive-level to entry-level employees and at all levels in between. Marella has worked with government, military, civilian and corporate teams as well as with individuals to bridge gaps in perspectives and expectations--all while achieving record-setting improvements in the areas of safety, schedule, cost and performance.

Dr. Michael Heah is the CEO of Corporate Coach Academy, a leading coaching school. He is also Chairman of the Malaysian Association of Certified Coaches. He is also an ICF Master Certified Coach.

Simon Yap Wing Kwee is a sales capability coach. Simon is affiliated to the International Coach Federation (ICF) Global; and Malaysian Association of Certified Coaches (MACC). Yap is the founder of Minds & Senses Coaching Academy. He clocked more than 500 coaching hours in practice helping business leaders, senior managers, and Heads of Department shaping up their business acumen, leadership presence, and coaching performance in accelerating organization success. He loves what he does.

Veronica Holcomb, MA, BCC, VJ Holcomb Associate, Inc.

Veronica Holcomb is a pioneer, leader, and expert in the field of leadership development. She is the author of Ready, Set, Grow, a speaker with the American Management Association, a Certified EQ Mentor, and Feedback Specialist with the Center for Creative Leadership.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Briefly describe what attracted you to the coaching industry and what is your coaching niche?
2. What are the top three (3) opportunities you see for the coaching industry today?
3. What can coaches do to establish coaching as a viable option for organizations?
4. What are the top three (3) challenges for the coaching industry today?
5. What are the current more global roadblocks for coaching in organizations?
6. What values do you see coaches contribute to organizations (profit and non-profit)?
7. What role should coaching have to add value to organizations growth?
8. How would you classify a coaching initiative in a global organization in order to convince leadership of its value?
9. Do you measure coaching value? If so, how?
10. How do you measure Return on Investment (ROI) for coaching? (If different from previous question).
11. What should be included in a Coaching ROI for global organizations?
12. How important is holding a certification or credentials as a coach?
13. What are the differences between certified and credentialed coaches?
 - a) Would it make a difference outside of the United States to hold one or the other, or to not hold one at all?
 - b) Why do you think it makes a difference?
 - c) Where do you think it would make a difference?
14. Do you hold or plan to hold a certification or credentials as a coach?