

# **RESEARCH PROJECT “QUESTIONING SEQUENCES IN EXECUTIVE COACHING”**

## **Wider research context**

Asking questions is essential in helping professions. Our project analyzes questioning practices in systemic-solution oriented, work-related coaching. Coaching builds on the interaction between coach and client, addresses clients' work-related problems and aims to facilitate clients' change. Theoretical models describe change via specific developmental phases clients pass through. Yet, these are not observable. What can be observed is the sequentially organized coaching interaction and how its turn-based sequences develop and transpire across the continuum of coaching sessions. Such sequential relations between turns ensure the transformation of clients' experience and contribute to the process of change across successful coaching interactions.

Although coaching is widely practiced, its academic foundation is still underdeveloped. Questioning practices, considered as a crucial intervention, represent a principal research gap.

## **Research questions and objectives**

Which kinds of questioning sequences (i.e. coaches' questions, clients' responses and coaches' follow-up turns) occur across a coaching process? What are their coaching-specific functions? How frequent are the various types of questioning sequences? What relationship exists between frequency of un- / successful sequences and local and global effectiveness of coaching? The project aims to develop a coaching-specific typology of questioning sequences and to investigate their coaching-specific change potentials. A special focus is on 'third position action' capturing coaches' reactions to clients' responses on the basis of their systemic solution oriented coaching agenda and on the relationship of the third position with the global effectiveness, defined as goal attainment.

## **Approach and methods**

The study uses authentic, video-taped and linguistically transcribed processes from systemic-solution oriented coaching. It brings together qualitative linguistic methods (Conversation Analysis, *Gesprächsanalyse*) and qualitative/quantitative psychological methods (Qualitative Content Analysis, Descriptive Statistics) in a mixed-methods research design.

## **Level of originality / Innovation**

The project significantly advances coaching research. It complements our understanding of questioning as central intervention in helping professions by adding insights from the format 'coaching'. The study breaks new methodological grounds for its interdisciplinary approach and mixed methods research design that allow for bringing together sequentially organized coaching interaction and phases of change for the first time. By drawing on Austrian, German and Swiss data, it covers the entire German-speaking coaching market.

### **Primary researchers**

The cross-border cooperation is carried out by two linguists (Eva-Maria Graf, University of Klagenfurt, Austria, Thomas Spranz-Fogasy, Leibnitz-Institute of the German Language, Germany) and a psychologist (Hansjörg Künzli, Zürcher Hochschule of Applied Sciences, Switzerland). Graf and Künzli are also trained coaches. In addition, there will be three PhD students, two project members and various student assistants working on the project

### **Schedule**

The projects starts March 1, 2021 and will run for 36 months.

### **Contact and more information**

For more information (there will also be a newsletter available), please send an email to:

[eva-maria.graf@aaa.at](mailto:eva-maria.graf@aaa.at)