Article

Coaching Approach as a Sustainable Means of Improving the Skills of Management Students

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Abstract: The impetus for the development of coaching as a professional managerial activity is based on the needs and requirements of a modern sustainable society. This paper aims to explore the awareness of academic students about the coaching approach and to formulate recommendations for its application in the academic environment so that students are prepared for the requirements of practice. This article focuses on the views of experts in the field of the coaching approach as a means of improving communication in the academic environment, characterizes communication skills and the coaching approach, and describes coaching models and their benefits and barriers. This research aims to survey the awareness of the coaching approach among college and university students in Slovakia and the possibilities of its application in the academic environment. The primary research was carried out by the inquiry method with 689 students. An evaluation of the questionnaire and a statistical evaluation of the established hypotheses and assumptions concerning the coaching approach were conducted. According to the survey, 468 students, representing 68% of respondents, had knowledge about coaching. Furthermore, 68% of students had or have doubts about achieving their goals during their studies. According to the results of the survey, only 24% of students had experience with coaching. Cooperation with a coach was regarded as beneficial for 76% of the students who had already experienced coaching lectures who took part in the survey. The proposition of the students was the implementation of the subject "Foundations of coaching", which could be offered to be taught to all students at the University of Zilina, Slovakia. The students of managerial fields would benefit by enhancing their leadership skills and providing support to their working teams, completing their final thesis, searching for professional job opportunities, and also coping with everyday life and stressful situations. Finally, we suggest the organization of introductory full-day workshops in specific areas of coaching for students of management, who are future managers. This will help to raise the awareness of the coaching approach at the University of Zilina in cooperation with the Counseling and Career Center and its activities.

Keywords: management; sustainability tools; coaching process; communication; educational institution; social sustainability of human beings

1. Introduction

Managerial communication is a type of social communication that takes place in the internal and partly external environment of a given organization. In terms of content, it is focused on ensuring the functioning of the organization and on supporting the fulfillment of set goals (Seemann 2018). This is also reflected in the use of specific means of expression, communication tools, the attitude of managers and the structure of the organization's entire

information system. It is primarily used by the managers (or a team of managers), who fulfill their managerial roles through communication.

Coaching is a sophisticated way of acting and communicating, especially in the advanced management environment of 21st century leaders. With this approach, we provide others with what they need in a given moment—certainty, understanding, hope, trust, confidence, motivation, and energy. We also support them in being creative in finding solutions, making their own decisions, and taking responsibility within an agreed range of their competence.

Coaching is an activity that, due to its effectiveness, has justification both now and in the future of organizational leadership. Every day, mastering coaching techniques is a sought-after strength of not only managers at work but also subordinates and students during their studies and everyday life. Moreover, the coaching approach can be used by experienced teachers at schools or universities, and in some places, students are even taught to master coaching principles.

Coaching can be defined in many ways. The essence of coaching is helping people, in this case, especially students, to change what they wish for and help them go in the direction they want to go, encouraging them at every level to become who they want to be by building awareness, giving choices, and inspiring change (Filsinger 2014; Milner et al. 2020; Bachkirova 2016). As reported by Lefdahl-Davis et al. (2018), coaching university students is extremely important, especially because it can increase their self-confidence, satisfaction with their choice of study field, their awareness of values and compliance with decision-making, their connection to life goals, and their individual goal setting and their achievement. Coaching is defined in the literature in several ways. Some of these definitions include the idea that coaching is an advisory and supportive process (Greif et al. 2022), while others emphasize goal setting and organizational outcomes (Grant 2003). Perhaps the most world-recognized definition of coaching is that of the International Coaching Federation (ICF 2022), which defines coaching as "*partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. The process of coaching often unlocks previously untapped sources of imagination, productivity, and leadership*". Most of these definitions have in common the notion that coaching involves a close trusting relationship between a coach and a client, which is aimed at improving the client's results, the results of the organization, or both (Cannon-Bowers et al. 2023).

It focuses on high performance and improvement at work, although it can also affect an individual's private life. It focuses on specific skills and objectives (Boysen et al. 2021; Bresser 2013b).

Coaching is about gaining inspiring awareness and skills, but most of all, it is about changing attitudes. It focuses mainly on creating, strengthening, and developing positive attitudes in each person toward themselves, other people, and their company.

Coaching is a relationship between two equal partners—the coach and the coachee—based on mutual trust, openness, and sincerity. It is oriented toward success and growth in the professional and personal life of individuals and teams. The coach guides the coachee to listen to themselves, understand themselves and their surroundings better, set their vision for the future, derive their goals from this vision, and then gradually implement these goals (Bresser 2013a).

The coach supports the coachee and uses specific means and styles of communication. Effective coaching skills are shown in Figure 1.

Coaching reinforces several valuable qualities, such as responsibility; openness and sincerity; a positive attitude; the joy of work and life; life optimism; respect, tolerance, and sensitivity for other people; distance and foresight; focus on goals and priorities; fairness, self-control; and self-confidence (Lin et al. 2016; Nadeem et al. 2013; Passarelli 2015).
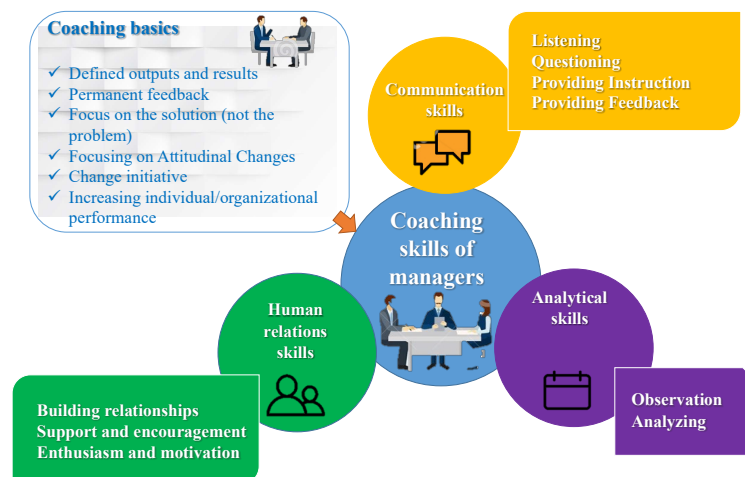
Figure 1. Coaching skills of managers.

The coach entirely focuses on the client and supports the client's self-expression, awareness, and prospects into action and learning. The coach also facilitates the client's autonomy in the coaching process (Britton 2015; Eldridge and Dembowski 2004; Hagen and Peterson 2015).

Coaching is understood in quite different ways. It has a wide range of uses, from on-the-job training, especially for new employees, to stimulating potential and as an aid in coping with difficult situations. It is used in different cases, for different purposes, and to achieve goals relevant to coaching, which can be helpful both in teaching and in applied coaching practices. To meet individuals' characteristic needs, various coaching approaches, styles, and techniques are constantly being developed and supplemented (Hawkins 2014). Coaching can successfully work for a group or a team, too. Examples of coaching themes and the main types of coaching are shown in Figure 2.

Coaching can be used in individual, group, or team settings (Kim and Noh 2016; Muñoz Obino et al. 2016; Passmore 2009). The contexts for the usage of coaching are practically unlimited, including management decisions, self-command, work–life balance, education enhancement, stress management, minimizing feeling stuck, coping with stress in relationships, well-being, and the area of sports (Pimpinelli 2017; Pullen and Crane 2011; Rosinski 2003; Rousseau et al. 2013; Loučanová and Nosáľová 2020). The limiting factor is the actual need within the context. Coaching helps with defining one's goals and visions and finding the motivation, pathways, and commitment to achieve them. Coaching does not provide knowledge or training in the traditional meaning. Instead, it facilitates one's development and advocates changes in mindset.

One of the most important and sought-after skills in the modern workplace is the ability to coach others (Wang et al. 2016; Boysen et al. 2021). It is one thing to identify coaching as a vital capacity—it is another thing altogether to develop that capacity.

During coaching, the coach uses various tools and models to help the coachee to achieve their set goals. Active listening is an essential coaching competence that a coach should master. Active listening means taking note of the speaker, maintaining eye contact with them, giving them full attention, verifying one's understanding of what they said, reflecting on the received information, and focusing on nonverbal communication (Sherman and Freas 2004; Whitmore 2010; Hills 2018; Bakhshandeh 2023).

A coach focuses on what their clients say and what they do not say explicitly to fully understand the subject of communication concerning the given circumstances in which the client is, thereby supporting the client in expressing their thoughts and feelings. In addition, the coach considers the client's identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs to better understand what the client is communicating (Boyatzis et al. 2024; O'Connor 2023; Seemann and Repková 2017; Sherman and Freas 2004; Ely et al. 2010).
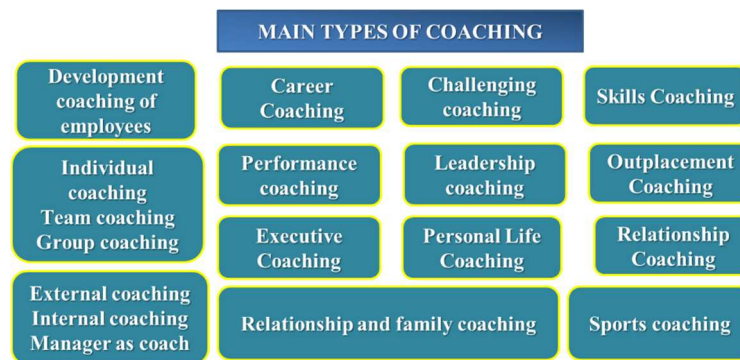
Figure 2. Coaching themes and main types of coaching.

Asking questions is another crucial coaching skill. Different managerial situations require further questions. Properly asked coaching questions can be characterized by three points: they are simple; they are based on a particular system, with specific questions on goals, their current state, and the search for possibilities; they are designed to have a positive impact on the client. The questions are mainly used to define the client's goal. The coach helps to create a comprehensive and detailed description of the client's target state, where the problems are already solved. Experienced coaches begin coaching interviews with relatively broad questions during most coaching processes. As the interview progresses, the questions gradually focus on the details, and the coach uses open-ended questions (Boyatzis et al. 2024; O'Connor 2023; O'Connor et al. 2022; Louridas et al. 2022; Atkinson et al. 2022; Seemann and Repková 2017).

According to John Whitmore, one of the founders of coaching (Whitmore 2010), the coach does not obtain the information to use it for themselves. Instead, the questions' purpose is to determine if the client has the information he or she needs. However, the answers the coach receives often show him or her where to focus the following questions.

The meaning of coaching questions is in searching for possibilities and not in finding the answers. Their job is to help them take responsibility for their own goals and results, not to tell the coachee what exactly to do.

The GROW model, named by John Whitmore (2010), is a transparent system of questions linked to other methods of people management. It is a non-directive coaching method that leaves finding the solutions solely up to the coachee. It assumes that every person has great potential, which is mostly not fully utilized. The model deduces that the responsibility for the process outcome rests with the coached person, who determines the content of the process (Sherman and Freas 2004; Stofkova et al. 2015).

If the coach wants to structure coaching using the GROW model, they should first discuss the goal with the coachee. The coach and the coachee must look at the behavior, activity, or skill that the coachee wants to change, and then structure this change as a goal they would prefer to achieve together (Benesova 2016; Bennet 2021; Blanchard 2018).

It is necessary to make sure that the goal is SMART. This means the goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (Boyle et al. 2021).

Team coaching involves a single coach—a trained team leader—working with a group of managers or executives (Brennan and Hellbom 2016; Daňková 2013). There are often two (or more) coaches to facilitate the team coaching process (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Team coaching.

When the coaching approach is used by management and the majority of leaders in an organization, a coaching culture may be created. The benefits of introducing a coaching culture in a global organization are:

- A positive impact on the strategic objectives of organizations, leading to improved business results (Passmore 2009; Pimpinelli 2017; Pullen and Crane 2011);
- Introducing coaching competencies is a strategy to create an adaptive workplace culture committed to an ongoing development and learning process (Rosinski 2003; Rousseau et al. 2013);
- Significantly reduced staff turnover, increased productivity, and higher level of employees' satisfaction at work;
- The promotion of open communication, the building of trust and respect, and the improvement of working relationships (Wang et al. 2016);
- A more conscious focus on their people, even if it may not be directly measurable in terms of financial issues (Boysen et al. 2021).

According to the International Coach Federation (Boysen et al. 2021), one can achieve the following through coaching:

- Statistics such as 62.4% better target settings, 60.5% more balanced life, 57.1% less stress, 52.4% more self-confidence, 44.3% better quality of life, and 25.7% higher income;
- If the coach is firmly convinced that the coachee has sufficient potential and responsibility, then he or she needs the expertise to enable his or her coaching (Whitmore 2010; Boysen et al. 2023).

It is also necessary to be aware of the risks and difficulties that are part of coaching. During the in-depth process, coaches may also discover something of which the client is ashamed or frightened. To some extent, such a concern is needed because of the change that is about to take place. The coach must be prepared for this and ensure a safe environment

for coaching (Plotkina and Sri Ramalu 2024; Nyfoudi and Tasoulis 2021; Okeke et al. 2021; Reynolds 2020; Seemann and Repková 2017). However, several authors draw attention to self-help coaching, which is the subject of criticism all over the world. The nature of this criticism is that you cannot ask yourself the proper (sometimes surprising) questions. Moreover, if you do ask yourself the right questions, you are limited in finding multiple high-quality answers based on a trusting relationship and patience. A coach provides silence to create the space for you to reflect and look for the answers.

An organization that adopts a coaching culture will also gain higher performance and productivity levels; human development; a better ability to learn; better relationships; higher quality of life; more time for the manager; thought leaders; better use of people, their abilities, and skills; more resources; faster and more effective responses to threats; greater flexibility and adaptability to change; more motivated employees; culture change; and widely usable and vital ability (Dassen 2015; Dembkowski et al. 2009; Grant 2009). To sum up, the coaching culture contributes to the sustainability and development of an organization's staff and its culture.

In the following survey, we study how informed and experienced university students are with the coaching approach, especially those of managerial fields/subjects—future leaders.

2. Results

The main goal of the survey was to assess awareness of the coaching approach and the possibility of its application in an academic environment. Another goal was to determine whether the respondents had experienced coaching or would recommend it, and if they had no experience with it, whether they would be interested in the coaching process. The final goal was to find out whether the respondents would be interested in signing up and completing the study subject of "Foundation of coaching" at their college or university.

The following assumptions were established to fulfill the individual goals:

Assumption no. 1: A total of 75% of the respondents have doubts about achieving some goals during their studies.

Assumption no. 2: A total of 90% of the respondents have had no coaching experience (have not worked with a professional coach).

Assumption no. 3: A total of 80% of the respondents who have had experience with coaching have a positive impression of working with a professional coach.

Assumption no. 4: More than 60% of the respondents would be interested in studying the subject of coaching at universities.

According to the results, we found that 69% of the respondents had or have doubts about achieving their goals during their studies. Based on the survey results, 75% of the respondents have had no experience with coaching or have never worked with a professional coach. Therefore, we can claim that this assumption was not met. For the 76% of respondents who have worked with a coach, it was beneficial or very beneficial. They have a positive impression of cooperation with a professional coach. A total of 71% of the respondents would like to implement the subject of "Foundation of Coaching" at their university or college study program. According to the results of the survey, this assumption was met.

Question No. 1: What do you think the term coaching means?

According to the survey, we found that 68% (468 students) were aware of coaching, as their answers to this question were correct. On the other hand, we found that 32% (221 students) did not know about coaching because their responses were incorrect. The participants in the survey regarded coaching as: management (28.16%), training (15.09%), guidance (11.90%), mentoring (4.21%), management (3.05%), development (9.58%), motivation (3.77%), helping students (9.87%), improvement (1.02%), learning (6.10%), support (2.32%), and the process of achieving a goal using questions the coach asks (1.31%). Meanwhile, 1.45% of the involved students considered coaching to be the transfer of experience from the coach to the coachee. Also, 2.18% of the students could not answer this question.

Question No. 2: Do you have experience—have you ever worked with a coach?

We found that some respondents had experience with coaching and have been coached. Out of the total number of respondents, only 172 students had experience with coaching, representing 25%. Most students, 75% (517 students), had no experience with coaching.

Question No. 3: Would you be interested in working with a professional coach?

With this question, we asked the respondents who had not yet had experience with a coach whether they would be interested in working with a professional coach.

This question was answered by 517 respondents, i.e., those respondents who do not yet have experience with coaching. A total of 249 students (48.2%) were more interested in working with a coach, and 153 students (29.6%) were more uninterested in working with a coach. A total of 65 students (12.6%) were interested in coaching, and 50 students (9.7%) were not interested in coaching.

Question No. 4: Did you use the services of the following experts during your studies? (Option to mark multiple answers.)

The respondents had the option to mark multiple answers. Most respondents did not use the services of any expert during their studies (539 responses). The second most marked answers were psychologists (85 answers), career counselors (31 answers), and coaches (31 answers). The respondents also used the services of a psychotherapist (27 responses) or a psychiatrist (21 responses). A total of 17 respondents also marked the option "Other", suggesting they used the services of a coach, educational advisor, special pedagogical advisor, teacher, or trainer when writing their final thesis. They also used counseling services from their friends, acquaintances, or classmates.

Question No. 5: To what extent do you believe you would achieve your goals more effectively when working with a coach?

As many as 461 students (67%) rather believed and 118 students (17%) believed that cooperation with a coach would help them achieve their goals more effectively. A total of 85 students (12%) rather did not believe, and only 25 (4%) students did not believe that working with a coach would help them achieve their goals more effectively.

The following hypotheses were established for the fulfillment of the individual goals:

Hypothesis No. 1: This hypothesis was based on the questions "To what extent the cooperation with a coach was beneficial for you" and "Based on your experience with a professional coach, would you recommend cooperation with a professional coach to your friends?"

Question No. 9: To what extent was working with a coach beneficial to you in achieving your goal? This question was answered by only those students who already had experience with coaching, and therefore, the total number of responses was 172. For 76 students (44%), cooperation with a coach in achieving their goal was beneficial, and for 55 students (32%), cooperation with a coach was very beneficial. A total of 36 students (21%) could not determine the degree of benefit. We could also positively evaluate the fact that for only 5 students (3%) cooperation with a coach was not beneficial, and for no student was it not beneficial at all.

Question No. 10: Based on your experience with a professional coach, would you recommend working with a professional coach to your friend? Cooperation with a coach was evaluated positively by the students, and up to 84 students (49%) would recommend it to their friends. A total of 75 students (44%) would rather recommend it, 12 students (7%) would rather not recommend cooperation with a coach, and 1 student (1%) would not recommend it at all.

We established the following null and alternative hypotheses:

H0: *There is no dependence between the benefit of cooperation with a professional coach and the recommendation of cooperation with a professional coach.*

H1: *There is a dependence between the benefit of cooperation with a professional coach and the recommendation of cooperation with a professional coach.*

The values of Cramer's V and Phi are at the level of 0.404 (Figure 4), which means that there is a moderately strong dependence between the variable of the benefit of working with a professional coach and the variable of recommending working with a professional coach because the value is in the interval of 0.3–0.8. To summarize, we state that based on the statistical evaluation of Hypothesis No. 1, we found out that there is a medium-strong dependence between the benefit of working with a professional coach and the recommendation of working with a professional coach.

Symmetric Measures		Value	Approximate Significance	Exact Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.404	0.000	0.000
	Cramer´s	0.404	0.000	0.000
N of Valid Cases		172		

Figure 4. Cramer's V and Phi values for Hypothesis No. 1.

Hypothesis No. 2: This hypothesis is based on the questions "What topic would you like to solve when working with a professional coach?" and "Is it important for you to work with a coach from a specific field?"

Question No. 12: What topic would you like to solve when working with a professional coach? The surveyed respondents were most interested in working with a coach on the topics of career (286 answers), personal development (282 responses), education and study (258 responses), and stress (206 responses). The respondents were also interested in coaching on the topics of finance (201 responses) and time management (171 responses). Among the topics that the respondents were not very interested in were time management (171 answers), fears and anxieties (165 answers), sports (164 answers), and life partners and relationships (151 answers), as shown in Figure 5. In response to this question, seven respondents indicated another option, suggesting they would be interested in topics such as a healthy lifestyle and healthy eating, writing a bachelor's thesis, eating disorders, and coping with urges and conflict situations.

Figure 5. The topics of coaching.

Question No. 15: Is it important for you to work with a coach from a particular field? We can see that the professional focus of the coach was important to the respondents, because for up to 305 students (63%), it was important that their coach would be focused exactly on their topic. A total of 108 students (22%) preferred a coach with a general focus, and 73 (15%) respondents did not care about their coach's professional focus.

We established these null and alternative hypotheses.

H0: *There is no dependence between the need for coaching in a specific area and the importance of the coach's focus.*

H1: *There is a dependence between the need for coaching in a specific area and the importance of the coach's focus.*

First, it was necessary to determine the level of significance α, which we set at the level of 5%. Based on this, we created a contingency table with theoretical frequencies (expected), with the help of which we could determine the test we used to evaluate the hypothesis. After merging some categories, we found that we met the conditions, as 17 theoretical abundances out of 21 were greater than or equal to 5. Therefore, we could use the Chi square test in the next step (the significance value was 0.0), as shown in Figure 6.

Chi-Squere Test			
	Value	df	Approximate Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	45.767[a]	12	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	38.405	12	0.000
N of Valid Cases	486		

a. 4 cells (19%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected counts is 2.7

Figure 6. Representation of the sig value of the Chi square test.

Figure 7 shows that the significance value was 0.0, and therefore, was less than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, we rejected the established null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis: There is a dependence between the need for coaching in a specific area and the importance of the coach's focus. Using the value of Cramer's V, we also determined how strong the dependence between the selected variables was.

Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.307	0.000
	Cramer´s V	0.217	0.000
N of Valid Cases		486	

Figure 7. Cramer's V value for Hypothesis No. 2.

Based on the value of Cramer's V, we found that the dependence between the need for coaching in a specific area and the importance of the coach's focus was weak.

Hypothesis No. 3: This hypothesis was based on the questions "Did you have doubts about achieving certain goals during your studies?" and "During your studies, would you accept the professional help of a coach who would be able to help you achieve your goals? A total of. 303 students (44%) would accept, and 264 students (38%) would rather accept the professional help of a coach during their studies. A total of 92 students (13%) would rather not accept, and only 30 students (4%) would not accept the professional help of a coach during their studies.

Question No. 21: Did you have doubts about achieving certain goals during your studies? As shown in Figure 8, as many as 276 students (40%) had doubts about achieving specific goals during their studies. Furthermore, 196 students (28%) stated they had slightly more doubts about achieving their goals. A total of 170 students (25%) had almost no doubts about setting their goals, and only 47 students (7%) had no doubts at all about achieving their goals.
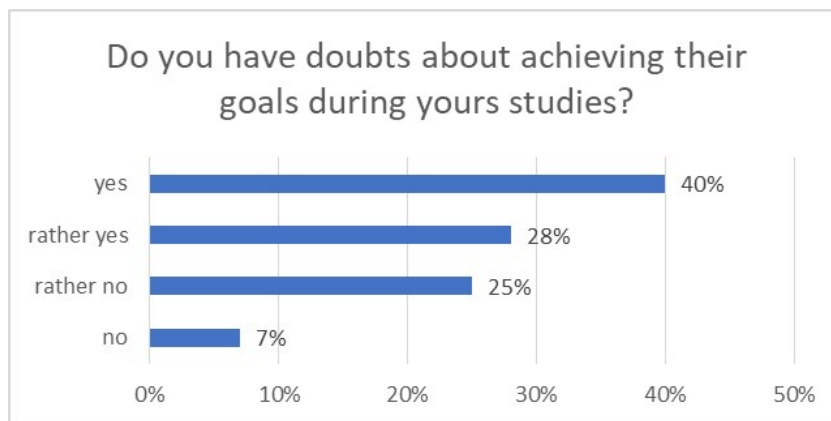
Figure 8. Students' doubts about achieving their goals during their studies.

We stated the following null and alternative hypotheses:

H0: *There is no dependence between the students' doubts regarding achieving their set goals and their consideration of receiving help from a professional coach.*

H1: *There is a dependence between the students' doubts about achieving their set goals and their consideration of receiving help from a professional coach.*

First, it was necessary to determine the level of significance α, which we set at the level of 5%. We calculated that the significance value was 0.0, and therefore, was less than the value of our determined significance level of 0.05, as shown in Figure 9. Therefore, we state that there is a dependency between the variables of "doubts about achieving goals" and "receiving help from a coach". In the next step, according to the value of Cramer's V, we determined how strong the dependence between the variables was. According to the Cramer's V, the dependence between the variables is weak.

Symmetric Measures		Value	Approximate Significance	Exact Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.207	0,000	0,000
	Cramer´s V	0.207	0,000	0,000
N of Valid Cases		689		

Figure 9. Cramer's V value for Hypothesis No. 3.

According to our survey, up to 75% of the students at the University of Žilina in Žilina, Slovakia, did not know whether the university offered any form of coaching for students.

However, the UNIZA Counseling and Career Center operates at the University of Žilina in Žilina, which offers coaching and psychological counseling for university students and employees. This is precisely why we recommend raising awareness of our activities and services, as up to 69% of students would be interested in these services if they knew about them.

We recommend raising awareness of the UNIZA Counseling and Career Center by updating the website, creating accounts on social networks, recording podcasts, providing professional information about psychological and coaching intervention, organizing job fairs, and organizing workshops where university students can learn how to create the necessary documents for a job interview, gain valuable advice on how to handle a job

interview, etc. According to the survey, we found that 67% of the students in our survey were interested in the subject of "Foundations of Coaching" at the university.

We, therefore, propose organizing a series of workshops on the "Foundations of Coaching" for students in managerial fields—future managers. The workshops should be aimed at students in their final study year, who should learn the coaching skills necessary for their future work life. Similar workshops could be offered to university teaching staff to inform them about the coaching approach and its use in the university environment (during lectures, seminars, labs, and graduation thesis guidance by teachers). Learning coaching competences would help teachers upgrade their teaching skills and enhance the quality of education they provide. If the coaching approach is used in academic management, it could bring similar benefits to better business communication and leadership, enhance teamwork, etc. The implementation and application of the coaching approach in the academic environment is also aligned with the overall goal to innovate the teaching and learning process and improve the quality of education.

3. Discussion

Many colleges do not use authentic coaching or the coaching approach in their curricula, and many universities do not develop these skills in students (future managers) yet. However, there are some exemptions in Slovakia.

Coaching can be personal, which requires a different level of relationship. While management is relatively neat, coaching can get messy. Coaching involves "going deep"; it requires that someone lets a coach in to see how clients perceive them, how they are feeling, what mood they are in, and what is getting in their way (Kim and Noh 2016; Accipio 2024; Straub and Straub 2022; Dennis 2024). Coaching leads one to think in more detail, and thus, helps one find one's own answers to questions or solutions to the challenges they face.

The benefits of personal coaching are as broad as the individuals who are affected by the coaching. Coaching improves employee performance and helps them develop their skills and knowledge about work, tasks, and responsibilities. Employees perform better and at a higher level when they know what to do and how to do it. Effective workplace coaching also makes it possible to identify employees with high potential and prepares them for promotion.

There is a difference in knowledge and attitudes between managers and employees. Managers lack contact with people and confidential knowledge of what is happening at a lower organizational level. On the contrary, employees generally do not have a broader view and knowledge of management techniques and approaches. This difference leads to mutual misunderstanding and often to the demotivation of employees, consequently limiting the company's success. Coaching can significantly reduce or even eliminate this difference.

Although effective coaching can play a valuable role in society, there are barriers to coaching and the operational use of coaching. Therefore, it is important to understand these perceived barriers in society and to address them to increase the likelihood of coaching success.

We can identify various elements as barriers that prevent organizations from using a coaching organizational culture, including an insufficient understanding of the value of coaching; not considering coaching a business priority; resistance from top management; a low level of coaching skills and experience within the organization; lack of time and financial resources (Hastings and Pennington 2019; Saberr 2018; Jimenez and Bucsek 2019; Carter 2023).

Accipio (2024) identified other obstacles, such as the leadership and management style of the organization; the credibility of internal coaches; the demand for coaching vs. the coaching capacity; the costs of external coaches; little understanding of the impact and benefits of coaching; conflicting relationships.

When considering the use of coaching in organizations, it is essential to understand and address potential barriers to coaching in both approaches and communication (Klarin 2014; Molyn 2017; Newnham-Kanas et al. 2012; Steyn and Barnard 2024).

4. Materials and Methods

According to the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, there were 133,558 students of colleges and universities enlisted in the Slovak Republic in the academic year of 2021/2022. This number of students represents a sample set in our survey. We, therefore, calculated the relevant sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{(z^2 \times p \times (1-p)) + e^2}{e^2 + z^2 \times p \times \frac{(1-p)}{N}} \tag{1}$$

where:
n—relevant sample (pcs);
N—population size (pcs);
e—permissible margin of error (%);
p—dispersion (%);
z—confidence level (%).

For our survey, the population size was 133,558 students. In our survey, the margin of error was set at 5%, the variance at 50%, and the confidence level at 95%.

According to the formula, the relevant sample for our survey was 385 respondents, i.e., university students. A total of 689 respondents took part in our survey, and therefore, we obtained a relevant sample for our survey.

The questionnaire aimed to determine whether the respondents had knowledge about the coaching process and had experienced the coaching process or approach.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of questions focused on basic demographic data about the respondent, such as their gender, age, level of study, field of study, and college/university.

The second part of the questionnaire was devoted to the respondents' knowledge about coaching. Finally, the third part of the questionnaire consisted of questions focused on the respondents' college/university, whether they encountered professional help during their studies, and whether the study subject of coaching had been introduced at their college/university in some form.

Regarding gender, 60% of our respondents were women, and 40% were men. A total of 56% of participants were in the age group of 19–22 years, 30% participants were in the age category of 23–26 years, and 13% of respondents belonged to the age category of 27 years and older.

The next question was focused on to what degree of study the participating students attended, i.e., whether they were studying at the bachelor's, master's, or PhD level. A total of 57% of the involved students were at the bachelor's level, 38% were at the master's level, and 5% of our respondents were PhD students.

With the next question, we determined what fields/branches the respondents' studied. The largest group of participating students were in technical science, namely 161 (23%). The second largest category of students were in the social, economic, and legal sciences, namely 132 students (19%). Students of natural sciences, mathematics, and informatics; students of humanities; students of arts and education; students of agricultural and veterinary sciences; students of health sciences and fields aimed at improving the quality of life; and students of security sciences, defense, and military were also involved in the study, as shown in Figure 10.

For this paper, we established three hypotheses based on specific questions, and four assumptions.

This survey was carried out using the questionnaire method. It was administered electronically in February 2022.
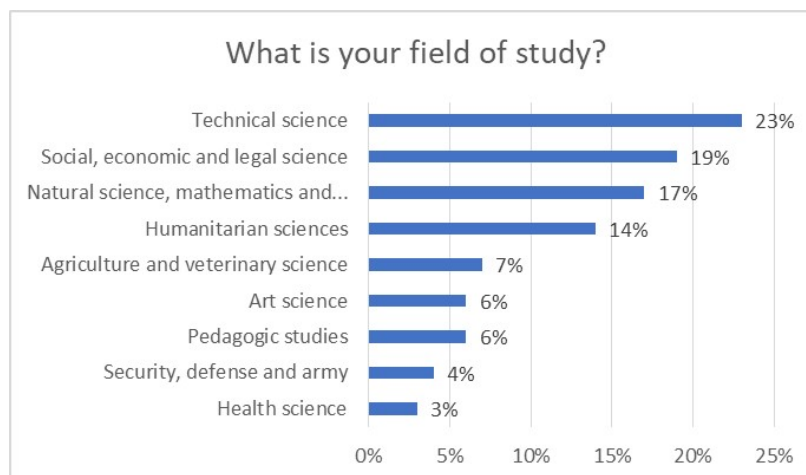
Figure 10. The fields of study.

Afterward, a contingency table of the expected frequencies was processed. Then, it was necessary to determine the level of significance α, which we set at the level of 5%. Next, we had to create contingency tables from the obtained data that show the actual frequencies. We created contingency tables with the theoretical (expected) frequencies. Then, testing was carried out to evaluate the hypotheses. If the conditions of the expected frequencies were not met (results higher than five), we performed Fisher's exact test. We also determined how strong the dependence between the variables was, after comparing the value of Cramer's V. We used the IBM SPSS STATISTICS 25 statistical program for the evaluation of the hypotheses.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to map out the awareness of the academic audience about the coaching approach and the possibilities of its application in the academic environment and to formulate recommendations for its implementation in the academic environment. The findings point to the following conclusions:

- Students have low experience of working with a coach;
- Students have some knowledge about coaching;
- Students had or have doubts about achieving their goals during their studies;
- Students are interested in the subject of "Foundations of Coaching" at their University or College;
- There is a dependency between the need to be coached in a specific area and the importance of the coach's professional focus;
- There is a dependency between whether the students had doubts about achieving goals and accepting help from a coach.

Based on the above findings, we recommend implementing a coaching approach into the curriculum, in cooperation with the Counseling and Career Center at the University of Žilina in Žilina, to raise awareness of the coaching approach at universities and colleges, offer coaching and psychological counseling for students and university graduates, and implement and raise awareness about workshops, activities, and services aimed at student coaching, etc.

The presented research was carried out using a questionnaire survey, which is an effective way of collecting data, but the quantitative nature of the questionnaire method did not cover the qualitative characteristics of individual changes in behavior, and as such, is limited to the interpretation of individual changes in behavior, which we consider to be the limits of this study. Therefore, in the future, we are considering the implementation of a qualitative survey or carrying out a survey at several universities in Slovakia and comparing the findings regarding the issue in question.

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