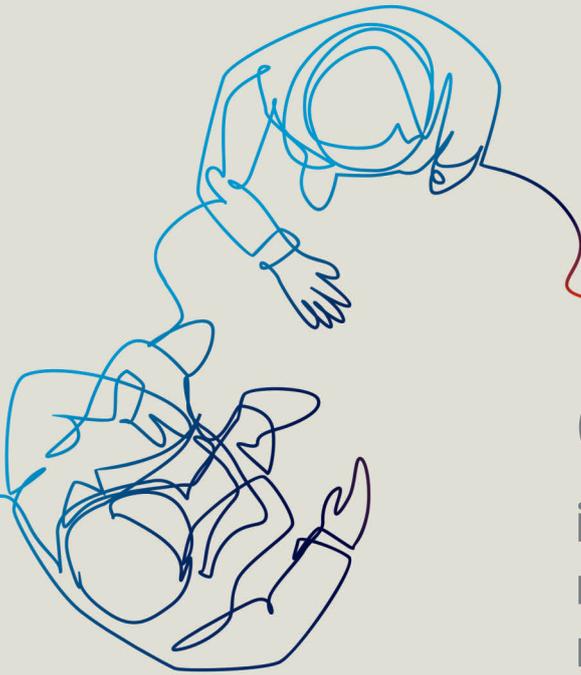


Coaching

in a
nontransparent
market

This whitepaper was commissioned by
NOBCO and ICF Netherlands



Coaching in a nontransparent market

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1. Motivation

Exponential increase in the number of coaches

According to the Chamber of Commerce Trade Register, the number of coaching providers almost doubled between 2014 and the end of 2019 (*Chamber of Commerce Trade Register, 2019*). In 2014 there were just under 38,000 providers of coaching, in 2019 there were more than 63,000. That is an increase of no less than 66%. This not only concerns self-employed coaches but also companies that offer coaching as a side activity, such as organizations that supply study/homework support.

Concerns about the quality of coaches

Yet only a fraction of Dutch coaches are affiliated with a professional organization such as NOBCO/EMCC Netherlands (*Dutch Association of Professional Coaches*) or ICF Netherlands (*International Coaching Federation Netherlands*). The increase in the number of coaches is leading to concerns among company doctors and psychologists to name a few. They are particularly concerned about the skills of all these new coaches (*MaxVandaag, 2019*).

Rambam's "Heel Holland Coacht" broadcast in 2020 underlines these concerns. The program made it clear that self-appointed coaches without coach training consider themselves perfectly capable of helping others, even when clients had serious psychological complaints (*Rambam, 2020*).

Parliamentary questions

On 16 March 2020, Paul Blokhuis, State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport, sent a letter to the House of Representatives (*Appendix Acts II, 2020D10697, 2020*). The letter was also sent on behalf of the State Secretary for Social Affairs and Employment and served as a response to the questions of MP Renkema about the television broadcast of Rambam. In the letter, the State Secretary indicates that "coach" is not a protected profession and does not fall under medical mental health care. As a result, he considers it up to the profession itself to make choices about professionalization. In addition, he writes that it is the responsibility on the part of the client (coachee) in the choice of a coach and making a decision based on, for example, education or qualifications.



The Netherlands has more than 63,000 coaches, from professionals to self-appointed.

2. Purpose of this white paper

“Coach” is indeed not a protected title. This means that anyone who wants to can call themselves a coach and everyone can use a different definition of “coaching”. The large increase in coaches and coaching in the Netherlands leads to a nontransparent coaching market in which people no longer know how to distinguish between a professional coach and a self-appointed coach.

The fact that coaching is not yet fully embraced as a profession also has to do with the fact that coaching has only recently been actively investigated in scientific literature (Bennett, 2006; Grover & Furnham, 2016). Because scientific research into coaching is still relatively young, there is a great need for quality control and

regulation (Bennett, 2006). On the other hand, the number of scientific publications on coaching has increased exponentially since 1990 (Grover & Furnham, 2016). This offers the opportunity to further professionalize the field.

The aim of this white paper is to use our social role as professional organizations to provide a broad public with insight into the social importance of coaching and the current knowledge about the effectiveness of coaching. In addition, it is intended to provide clarity about the difference between a self-appointed coach and a professional coach.

How do you know
if you're dealing with
a professional or a
self-appointed coach?

*‘It is up to the
profession itself to
make choices about
professionalization’*

State Secretary Paul Blokhuis.



3. Social importance of coaching

Before going deeper into the professionalization of coaching, we consider a number of social developments that justify the growing demand for coaching and its use.

Pressure on healthcare

The general mental health of the population seems to be deteriorating. Research by I&O Research in February 2021 found that 24% of participants indicated that their mental health had deteriorated since June 2019. Compared to a similar study by I&O Research in October 2020, the number of people who reported having depression or anxiety symptoms had

Coaches can reduce pressure on health care.

also increased. In 2021 participants gave their lives a lower score (6.6) than in the preceding months (7.0).

The same research by I&O Research showed that people also reported stress, due to Covid-19 and the associated measures, more often in early 2021 compared to October 2020. People had also experienced traumatic events such as a dismissal or the death of a loved one, (I&O Research, 2021).

In addition to the problems with the general mental health of the Dutch, mental health care is struggling with a shortage of capacity. The waiting lists at mental health care institutions are increasing (NZa, 2021). Recently the NOS (Dutch public media company) reported on

a patient stop in mental health care due to a shortage of practitioners and too long waiting lists (Van den Brink, 2021). Research by the NOS in 2017 into the number of vacancies for psychiatrists at mental health institutions showed 663 unfilled vacancies (Vleugels & de Vries, 2017). These were not caused by a shortage of psychiatrists, but because supply and demand were not matched. Psychiatrists increasingly appear to opt for their own practice or move to areas such as mindfulness or stress reduction.

Depending on the problem, professional coaches can be used to (indirectly) reduce the pressure on mental health care. For example, research shows that the use of coaching can be effective in reducing feelings of stress or depressive symptoms (Theeboom et al., 2014). But coaching can also be used preventively, for example to increase resilience or general well-being (Theeboom et al., 2014).

Mental health at work

Research by Mind Matters (2021) shows that poor mental health at work can cost an employer in Europe an average of between 1633 and 2021 euros per employee. The Mind Matters research report also indicates which programs organizations are deploying to improve employee mental health. Coaching is also mentioned. According to the same research report, increasing personal resilience is an essential part of the programs deployed to increase employee mental health. Coaching does indeed seem to be able to make a substantial contribution to increasing personal resilience, according to scientific research (Grover & Furnham, 2016).



Burn-out

A TNO (*Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research*) report containing data for the years 2014 to 2018 shows that the number of people reporting burnout complaints had increased in that period (*Houtman et al., 2019*). In 2018, 16.4% of male employees and 18.1% of female employees experienced burnout symptoms several times a month or more often. In total, that is 1.2 million employees (*Volksgesondheidszorg.info, 2019*).

Although the percentage of employees with burnout complaints increased between 2014 and 2018, the psycho-social burden that people experience at work hardly seems to have increased in those years. Although the perceived task requirements are high, and experienced autonomy is low, these have hardly changed between 2014 and 2018. However, an increase in time pressures and work non-dependant on location was reported, which may contribute to the increased figures with regard to burnout complaints. The current 24-hour society means that the boundaries between work and private life are becoming increasingly blurred. For one worker this will give a better balance, for the other this

increases the workload and the chance of burnout complaints. Research by Hays Netherlands among 1054 employees showed that in 2020 61% of employees indicated that work-life balance has indeed become more important to them and more than 31% also indicated that support for physical and mental well-being is now a priority (*Hays, 2020*). The NOBCO benchmark from 2020 showed that 77% of the coaching questions had to do with the work-life balance (*NOBCO, 2020*).

That coaching can contribute to the prevention of burnout is shown by various scientific studies (*Wagter et al., 2009; Solms et al., 2021*). There are also indications that coaching can make a positive contribution to improving work-life balance (*see, for example, Solms et al., 2021*).

Engaged and productive employees

According to annual research by Human Capital Institute in collaboration with ICF, the most frequently mentioned effects of coaching within companies are improved team functioning, higher employee engagement and increased productivity (*Filipkowski et al., 2016*). In organizations with a strong coaching culture,

61% of employees indicate that they are highly engaged compared to 53% of employees in organizations without a strong coaching culture (Filipkowski et al., 2017). In terms of financial impact, 46% of participating organizations with a strong coaching culture report that their revenue growth and productivity is greater than that of their peers, compared to 39% of employees in organizations without a strong coaching culture (Filipkowski et al., 2016).

Previous research has already shown that the top 5 reasons to use external coaches in companies consisted of: leadership develop-

ment, improvement of communication skills, improvement of collaboration in teams, improvement of decision-making processes and the increase in productivity. 53% of the companies surveyed used external coaches (Human Capital Institute in collaboration with the International Coaching Federation).

Scientific research indeed shows that coaching can increase issues such as work performance and organizational involvement (Theeboom et al., 2014).

4. Definition and vision on coaching

For further professionalization of the coaching profession, it is necessary to clearly define the field of expertise. Coaching is a form of guidance that is used within a non-clinical population to facilitate self-directed change, with the ultimate goal of increasing functioning and general well-being (see, among others, Grant et al., 2010; Grant, 2003). That coaching can indeed have positive effects on all kinds

of outcomes is evident from various scientific studies. For example, a meta-analysis (in which the data from multiple studies are reviewed) by Jones and colleagues (2015) showed that coaching had a positive effect on skills, satisfaction and individual performance, among other things. In addition, research by Theeboom and colleagues (2014) showed that coaching is generally an effective

Coaching	Psychotherapy
Aimed exclusively at the non-clinical population (i.e. people without serious mental health problems)	Initially aimed at people with more serious psychological problems that hinder functioning
Process is focused on the future	Process is more often focused on the past and old wounds
Equal relationship between coach and coachee; the coachee is in charge of the process	Psychotherapist often acts from an expert role and is in charge of the process

Some differences between coaching and psychotherapy are listed above (Bluckert, 2005; Hayden & Whitworth, 1995; Hart et al., 2001)

intervention in organizations and has positive effects on performance and skills, well-being, resilience, work attitude and goal-oriented self-management.

Research shows improvement of well-being, resilience and self-management.

Difference between coaching and psychotherapy

There are several ways in which people can get help with an issue. The most well-known form of guidance for psychological problems is psychotherapy. Sometimes mentorship is also set up. For the positioning and professionalization of the coaching profession, it is important to make a clear distinction between these different forms of guidance.

Coaching and psychotherapy have quite a few similarities. They both focus on behavioral change and help people understand how their cognitive and emotional responses can affect their personal effectiveness, performance, and well-being. Both coaching and psychotherapy are offered by skilled professionals who build a trust-based relationship with their clients or coachees. In addition, there are models and theories that are used in both coaching and psychotherapy.

Difference coaching and mentoring

A coach focuses on guiding a coachee to achieve certain goals. The goal of the mentor is to be available as a (knowledge) expert (*MacLennan, 2017*). A mentor can often fulfill their role fairly well with basic management- or people-oriented and/or educational skills. However, a good coach must have the right knowledge and skills to guide a coachee without being directive (*MacLennan, 2017*). With coaching, it is assumed that the coachee is responsible for his or her learning process. A mentor will be more likely to take over responsibility for the learning process (*MacLennan, 2017*).

Vision on coaching according to the professional organizations

The Dutch Association of Professional Coaches (*NOBCO/EMCC Netherlands*), part of EMCC Global, and the International Coaching Federation Netherlands, the Dutch division of the International Coaching Federation (*ICF*), are both international professional organizations for coaches with certifications that are used worldwide. NOBCO is the largest professional organization for coaches in the Netherlands and ICF is worldwide. Both NOBCO and ICF Netherlands are committed to the professionalization of coaching within and outside the Netherlands.

The vision of NOBCO is that professional coaching makes a substantial contribution to the well-being and development of people and organizations. The mission of NOBCO is that it is leading in the development of the coaching profession and contributes to the awareness and availability of professional coaching for the benefit of society.

ICF Netherlands' starting point is that coaching is an integral part of a thriving society, where every member of ICF represents the highest

quality of coaching. ICF exists to lead the global advancement of the coaching profession and empower the world through coaching.

Characteristics of a professional coach

According to the standards used by the NOBCO/EMCC Netherlands and the ICF, a professional coach has at least the following characteristics:

Working with a coach agreement

The coach designs the expectations and the boundaries about the coaching process with the coachee. Here, among other things, the coaching goal is shaped together and agreements are made with the various stakeholders about the collaboration.

Working on the relationship with the coachee

The coach builds a relationship with the coachee, where they experience a safe environment. A professional coach creates trust and closeness and has an objective attitude.

Focus on insights from the coachee

The coach helps the coachee to gain insights that help in their development and in achieving the coaching goal.

Working towards a goal

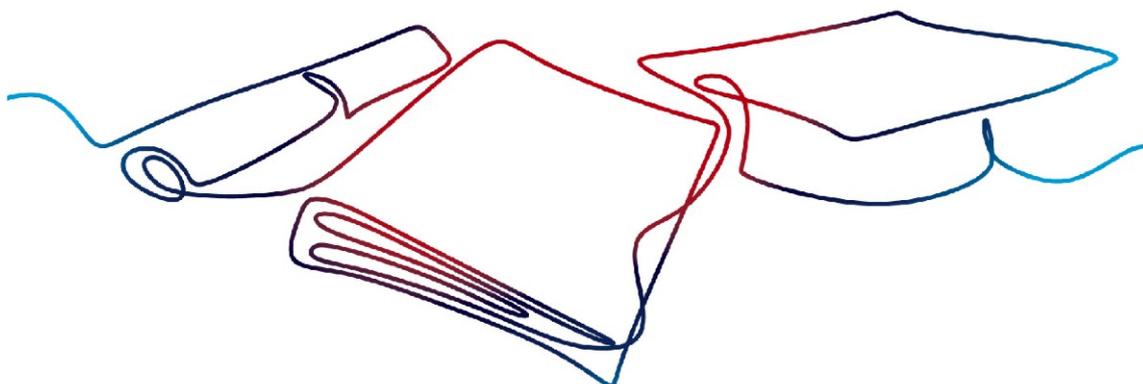
The coach supports the coachee in designing goal-oriented actions towards their desired development.

Working on continued personal development as a coach professional

The coach has followed a coaching course and continues to develop continuously during their coaching career. In addition, the coach regularly reflects on their own work, for example through mentoring and supervision.

Affiliation with a professional organization for coaches and work according to ethical guidelines

The coach is affiliated with a professional organization and works according to their ethical standard. This makes it possible to verify the standing of the coach with the professional organization. Most professional organizations have a complaints procedure. If unethical behavior is detected in a coach, the professional organization can proceed to withdraw the membership. Professional coaches have an individual certification, with which they offer transparency to the clients.



5. Choosing a coach

The choice of a professional coach versus a self-appointed coach can be made by checking whether a coach is certified with a professional organization.

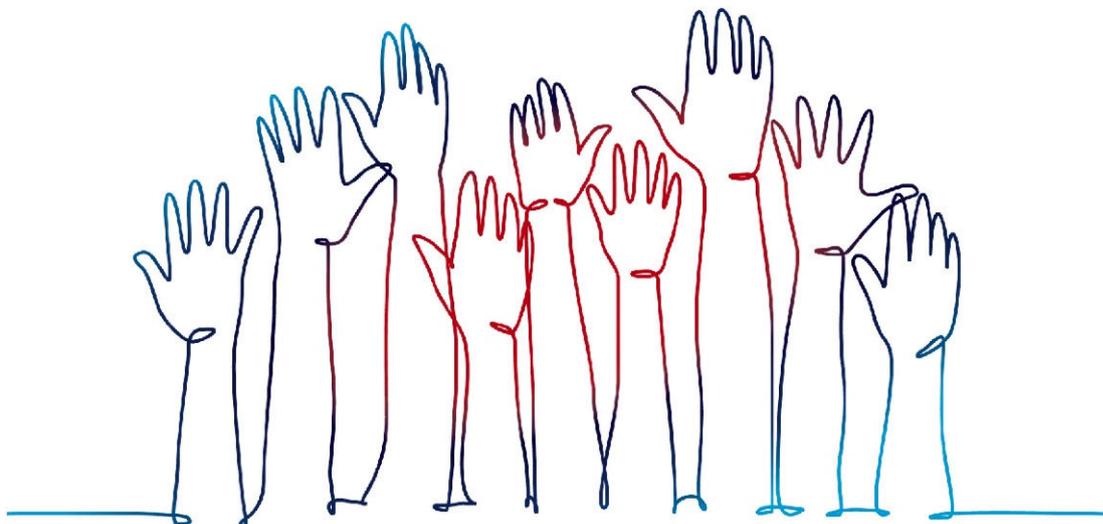
By choosing a certified coach, it can be assumed that the coach in question has been trained for the coaching profession, adheres to a code of ethics in their actions and conforms to the possibility of a complaints procedure. A professional organization can also help with a possible dispute between coachee and the coach.

Although there were already about 63,000 providers of coaching in 2019 (*KvK Handelsregister, 2019*), at the time of writing this White Paper, only about 5,000 coaches are affiliated with NOBCO and ICF Netherlands. The exact percentage of affiliated coaches with a professional organization is difficult to calculate. The 63,000 providers of coaching include not only individual coaches but also companies that offer coaching as a side activity. They, in turn, hire a coach for this.

So the number of individual coaches will probably have been lower than 63,000.

In addition, some coaches are affiliated with several professional organizations. Yet these figures show that only a fraction of coaches are affiliated with a professional organization. In addition, of the 5000 affiliated coaches at NOBCO and ICF Netherlands, approximately only 20% are actually certified. This suggests that coaches see little added value in joining a professional organization or gaining certification, or are not sufficiently familiar with this.

By joining or certifying through a professional organization, the coach contributes to their own professional distinction and professionalization of the field. In addition, the coach remains up to date on current developments in the field and continues to work on the development of their coaching skills.



6. Register of coaches

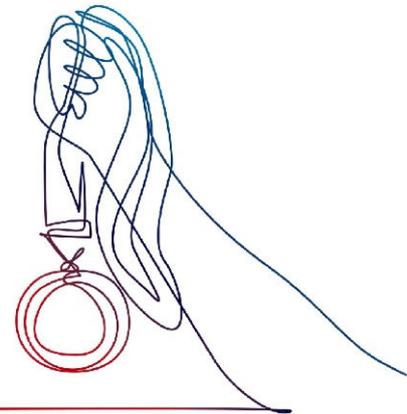
NOBCO and ICF Netherlands consider it important that stakeholders can verify the qualifications of a coach with a reliable source. To make this possible, a number of things are needed:

1. Recognition of each other's certifications by the participating professional organizations
2. Registration of the certifications in an accessible manner

Recognition

NOBCO and ICF Netherlands both use an international certification that is used worldwide. Although there are differences between the labels, the similarities are clearly visible in the relevant areas:

- Scientific knowledge and practical experience are the basis of the certification
- The coach meets demonstrable competencies
- There is registration of the number of hours of coaching experience, this registration is also checked
- In order to obtain an extension of certification, the coach is required to follow ongoing professional training
- The coach subscribes to an international ethical professional code, which focuses on the importance of the coachee and the reputation of the profession
- The coach endorses the importance of and undertakes to cooperate in the complaints procedure of the professional organization. This is staffed by an independent committee.



With a certification
you know
that the coach
has the right
competencies.

Registration

The certifications are awarded by independent bodies, which guarantees quality. Both NOBCO and ICF Netherlands keep a registration of awarded certifications. The registers of NOBCO and ICF Netherlands offer the possibility for stakeholders to reliably check the qualifications of a coach. A coach, in turn, must be able to submit their certifications upon request. Although the choice for a coach is ultimately a personal choice of a company and/or a coachee, the registers of both NOBCO and ICF Netherlands contribute significantly to the deployment of a professional coach.

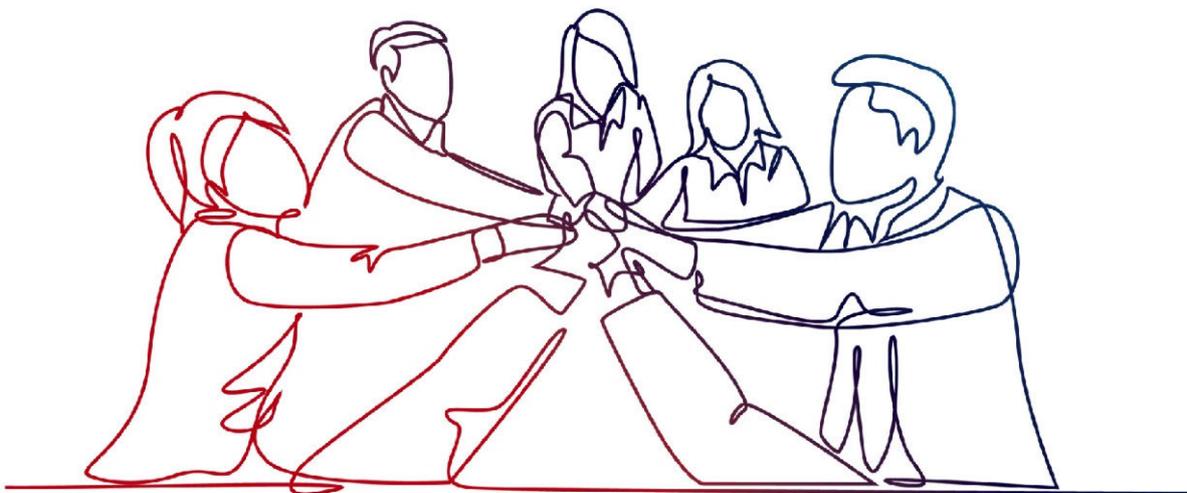
7. Appeal from NOBCO and ICF Netherlands

Working with people is one of the most rewarding things there is and it requires professionalism from the person who coaches.

With this White Paper, we as professional organizations are making a statement about the social relevance of coaching. We also offer clarity about what coaching is and what characterizes a professional coach. We call on companies, institutions and the government to support the professionalization of this profession. This can be done by using clear criteria in selection processes, the awarding of subsidies and the choices for a coach.

Above all, we hope that the added value of coaching in society is seen and recognized. It is an effective way for people to develop and a preventive tool when it comes to people's well-being and employability. If used in a professional manner, coaching in these turbulent times is, therefore, more valuable than ever.

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