



ICF Core Competency Updates: Webinar Conversations with Professional Coaches

Revised, July 2020

Since October 2017, ICF has engaged in rigorous job analysis research. From start to finish, more than 1,300 coaches—both ICF Members and non-members—from around the globe have participated in this process. These coaches represented a diverse range of coaching disciplines, training backgrounds, coaching styles, and experience and credentialing levels. The outcome of this important research was the November 2019 announcement and release of **updated ICF Core Competencies**, which will go into effect in the second half of 2021.

ICF held a series of webinars for ICF professional coaches—ICF Members and Credential-holders—to share information about the updated Core Competencies and answer questions. Following is a summary of the questions and accompanying responses from these webinar sessions.

Q: Will there be ACC and MCC Markers? When? Will they include the updated Core Competencies and the updated Code of Ethics?

Response: *The next phase of our work will be the development of updated assessments aligned with the updated Core Competencies, including performance assessment. This will be explored as part of this important work.*

Q: How will the updated Core Competencies affect program accreditation?

Response: *ICF Accredited Coach Training Programs will be required to integrate the updated Core Competencies into their training curricula by 2021, as part of the incremental renewal process. Training programs that are applying for ICF accreditation will be required to reflect the updated ICF Core Competencies in training curricula beginning in 2021.*

Q: Who should I contact if I have questions about how to understand the updated Core Competencies?

Response: *Questions about the updated Core Competencies can be sent to Support@coachfederation.org.*

Q: Why is Artificial Intelligence not addressed in the updated Core Competencies?

Response: *The updated Core Competencies are intended to illustrate the work of coaching, that is, the behaviors of a successful coach. It is also meant to show characteristics of a successful coach, that is, the worker. By definition, the updated model does not involve artificial intelligence (AI). It is our view that artificial intelligence will be a complement to human-human coaching, and will not necessarily replace human-human coaching.*

Q: Since the updated Core Competencies merge Powerful Questions, Direct Communication, and Creating Awareness into Evokes Awareness, will this competency be weighted more for assessment purposes?

Response: *The next phase of our work will be the development of new assessment processes that are in alignment with the updated Core Competencies. During this work we will be using best practices for assessment development to determine how to assign scoring weights to the different competency areas.*

Q: If you're applying for CCE's in 2020, which competencies should we be using?

Response: *Programs applying for CCE accreditation in 2020 should use the existing, original Core Competencies.*

Q: Will the CKA exam change? If so, who will have to take it and when will it be released?

Response: *A new version of the CKA is under development with an expected launch in the second half of 2021. This new version of the exam will align with the updated Core Competencies. Those who currently hold an ICF credential will not be required to complete this new version of the exam for renewal. However, individuals who choose to pursue a new ICF credential may be required to take a new version of the exam.*

Q: Where can I find specific examples of formal coaching agreements?

Response: *Sample coaching agreements can be found on the ICF website at the following link: <https://coachfederation.org/profile/member-toolkit>*

Q: Do you recommend re-evaluating our written coaching agreements in light of these changes?

Response: *The updated Core Competencies expanded the idea of coaching agreements to potentially include agreements with organizations, agreements for the overall client engagement, and agreements for each coaching session. While ICF does not mandate a specific set of agreements, coaches may wish to revise the agreements that they are currently using to take into consideration the updated Core Competencies.*

Q: Does competency 2 (Embodies a Coaching Mindset) assume that culture and context can be properly accounted for?

Response: *While it is impossible to fully understand or account for the many ways in which culture and context can impact an individual and their relationship with others, Competency 2 assumes that a coach has a general awareness of and openness to the influence that culture and contexts can have in shaping us as individuals.*

Q: Why isn't the body or somatics mentioned in Embodies a Coaching Mindset?

Response: *While we have anecdotal evidence that some coaches use somatic techniques in their practice, this element did not emerge to a significant enough extent in our data to be included.*

Q: How will competency 2 (Embodies a Coaching Mindset) be assessed?

Response: *This will be explored as we develop new assessments to align with the updated Core Competencies. Admittedly, this may be an area that is difficult to assess using our current performance evaluation process, but may be easier to test as part of a knowledge exam. The data we collected from coaches clearly showed that a coaching mindset was an important element that needed to be included in the updated Core Competencies.*

Q: How do you differentiate between ‘goals’ and ‘objectives’ in competency 3 (Establishes and Maintains Agreements)?

Response: *While similar, the word “goals” is used rather than “objectives” as a higher-level, less prescriptive word to describe what a client may wish to accomplish through coaching.*

Q: How will competency 3 (Establishes and Maintains Agreements) be assessed?

Response: *The updated Core Competencies expanded the idea of coaching agreements to potentially include agreements with organizations, agreements for the overall client engagement, and agreements for each coaching session. Agreements that occur within a coaching session can be assessed using our current assessment process. As the ICF develops new assessments, we will explore how we might assess the broader agreements that take place outside of each coaching session.*

Q: What is the difference between Establishing the Coaching Agreement (current model) with Establishes and Maintains Agreements (Updated Model)?

Response: *The updated Core Competencies expanded the idea of coaching agreements to potentially include agreements with organizations, agreements for the overall client engagement, and agreements for each coaching session. Additionally, the word “maintains” was added to the name of this competency to acknowledge the importance of revisiting and reconfirming agreements throughout the coaching engagement.*

Q: What is the difference between Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client (current model) with Cultivates Trust and Safety (Updated Model)?

Response: *The difference between “establishing trust and intimacy with the client” and “cultivates trust and safety” came about through the concern that the word “intimacy” had some unintended or misunderstood meanings in some languages. The use of the word “cultivates” was selected as a way of highlighting that creating a safe, supportive environment is an ongoing process that needs to be attended to throughout the coaching engagement.*

Q: How do coaches assist clients in communities that are strongly patriarchal (or religious) to feel safe and trusting when the gender or race we show up in already presupposes and apportions a particular status on the coach?

Response: *This aspect of coaching was outside the scope of our research project and would be a study in and of itself.*

Q: Why is partnership not mentioned in Competency 5 (Maintains Presence)?

Response: *A strong partnership between the coach and client is an important foundation of all the updated Core Competencies. From our analysis of the data collected from practitioners, the most relevant and useful places to include references to partnership were in competencies 3 (Establishes and Maintains Agreements), 4 (Cultivates Trust and Safety), and 8 (Facilitates Client Growth).*

Q: Why is the personal state of the coach not mentioned in Competency 5 (Maintains Presence)?

Response: *The personal state of the coach is certainly an important element of maintaining presence. We believe that the language in the definition for this competency "Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident" along with the sub-competencies relating to empathy, curiosity, and managing one emotions, directly relates to the personal state of the coach. The personal state of the coach is also addressed in some of the elements of competency 2, Embodies a Coaching Mindset.*

Q: In Competency 5 it mentions "manages emotions". Whose emotions are being managed, the coach's or the client's?

Response: *The coach is managing their own emotions, which is known as "self-regulation." You can learn more about this concept in the research paper on reflective practice here: <http://philosophyofcoaching.org/v4i2/02.pdf>*

Q: In Competency 5 it mentions "not knowing". Is this the coach's "not knowing" or the client's "not knowing"?

Response: *This is about the coach not knowing. The "not knowing" could be about many things, such as what to do next or what might happen next. The coach remaining present and confident in the client can be very important.*

Q: In Competency 7 (Evokes Awareness) it mentions the use of analogy. Isn't that prescriptive?

Response: *It is meant to be an example.*

Q: Since Competencies 9, 10, and 11 in the current model were merged into Competency 8 (Facilitates Client Growth) in the updated model, are you concerned that some coaches may skip important steps in the coaching process?

Response: *While Competencies 9, 10 and 11 in the original model have been combined into a single competency in the updated Core Competencies, virtually all the same concepts and behaviors are still reflected in the updated competency.*

Q: Will you be publishing a comparison chart between the current and updated Core Competencies?

Response: *Yes, the ICF intends to provide a variety of documents that compare the current model to the updated version. During the webinars, a high level crosswalk document was*

shown and more detailed versions of this will be provided.

Q: Could you say more about confidentiality in the updated Core Competencies? How do you recommend coach's protect client data (confidentiality)?

Response: *Each coaching relationship is unique and the levels of confidentiality may vary depending on the specific relationship and the agreements between each coach and client. What is critical, however is that a coach has a clear, transparent agreement with a client on what--if any--information may be shared, with whom and how it will be shared, and that this agreement is consistent with any applicable confidentiality or privacy laws. More information about confidentiality and client data protection is available in the ICF Ethics FAQs here: <https://coachfederation.org/icf-ethics>*

Q: Can you provide a single document with these summary points of the updated Core Competencies?

Response: *Yes, slides from this webinar, including the summary points of the updated Core Competencies, are available for download at <https://coachfederation.org/core-competencies>.*

Q: How will these changes impact those who are currently in the process of getting credentialed?

Response: *Those who are currently seeking an ICF credential and submit an application prior to the release of updated assessments in the second half of 2021 will be assessed using existing Credentialing assessments, which reflect the original Core Competencies.*

Q: What is the definition of a "critical incident"? Could you give an example?

Response: *The collection of critical incidents is a tool used in job analyses to find key moments and worker behaviors for successful performance of a given job. In our case we asked coaches to provide the context of each incident, the mental processes they were using, the actions of the coach, outcomes, an effectiveness rating of the incident, what was learned, and the modality used (face-face, telephone, video connection, etc.).*

Q: How was a client's intersectionality considered under "client context and culture" theme?

Response: *Intersectionality certainly could be an important part of a client's experience. This was discussed during the development of the updated Core Competencies and is part of the reason sub-competency 2.4 was written.*

Q: How will the ICF handle the vast ways context and culture is expressed throughout the world?

Response: *Culture and context naturally impacts the way coaching is delivered, and the global nature of our community of coaches--and the array of cultures and contexts they represent--is one of the factors that makes ICF such a strong association of professional coaches. The input and influence of such a diverse array of coaches and volunteers strengthen the programming and services that ICF offers and the collective understanding of the important cultural nuances of coaching across the globe. Through the Job Analysis research and Core Competency Update project, ICF included subject matter expert volunteers from every region of the world, and*

received input from professional coaches representing more than 80 countries. ICF remains committed to leveraging the input, insights and contributions from coaches and subject matter experts from around the world as we continue our work in assessment development for ICF Credentialing.

Q: Will the ICF Definition of Coaching change?

Response: *ICF does not have plans to change the definition at this time. However, from time-to-time ICF may review the definition of coaching and could make a change if a compelling reason emerges.*

Q: Will the new performance assessment or the new CKA be more difficult than the current?

Response: *During our work to develop new assessments we will be using best practices for the establishment of passing standards. This work will include an evaluation of the current assessments and will carefully consider how to equate the new assessments to those that are currently used.*

Q: Why is direct communication not in the updated Core Competencies? Is it seen as less important now?

Response: *From the data we collected from coach practitioners, direct communication did not show up as a standalone competency, but rather was woven into all competencies. Concepts related to effective communication shows up in the updated Core Competencies integrated into the sub competencies.*

Q: In Competency 1 (Demonstrates Ethical Practice) integrity is mentioned. How will integrity being assessed?

Response: *Admittedly, a coach's integrity will be difficult to assess in a coaching conversation unless the coach exhibits behavior that is clearly demonstrating a lack of integrity. During our work to develop new assessments we will be exploring ways to assure that coaches have a strong understanding of the ICF code of ethics and ethical practice including the importance of integrity and honesty through updated assessments, including performance and knowledge-based assessment.*

Q: In Competency 1 (Demonstrates Ethical Practice), core values are mentioned. What do you mean by core values?

Response: *The ICF Code of Ethics is based on the ICF Core Values (<https://coachfederation.org/about>) and the actions that flow from them. All values are equally important and support one another. These values are aspirational and should be used as a way to understand and interpret the standards. All ICF Professionals are expected to showcase and propagate these Values in all their interactions.*

Q: Could you provide more information on the updated Code of Ethics?

Response: *Yes, more information about the updated Code of Ethics is available at <https://coachfederation.org/icf-ethics>.*

Q: How do you define "grounded"?

Response: *Calm and present in the moment for the client.*

Q: What do you mean by the word "identity"?

Response: *The unique characteristics and manner through which a person views their individual nature.*

Q: What does "KAO" stand for? Can you give some examples?

Response: *Knowledge, Ability, and Other characteristics. An example of knowledge is an understanding of how a client might perceive a coach as being present. Knowing that looking the client in the eye and remaining quiet while the client is speaking are important elements of coaching. Being able to communicate well is an ability. This could include careful choice of words along with appropriate tone and emotion. Acting ethically could be considered an "other characteristic."*

Q: Overall it feels like the updated Competencies incorporate more MCC thinking and languaging. Is that intentional?

Response: *The updated competencies are meant to encompass all levels of coaching. Your perception that they incorporate more MCC thinking and language is coincidental since we did not explicitly include any such specific language.*

Q: How can I get Mentor Coach training in the updated Core Competencies?

Response: *The ICF currently does not offer mentor coach training, however there are many mentor coach training programs that have been accredited by the ICF. For more information, please see the ICF Training Program Search Service.*

Q: Mindfulness seems to be incorporated into the updated Core Competencies. Will mindfulness practice ever be encouraged by ICF?

Response: *Mindfulness is certainly a good practice that can help a coach to remain grounded and present for their clients. However, since it is not the only means to that end, we leave it open to the individual coach to choose which practices to use. Further information can be found in the research paper here: <http://philosophyofcoaching.org/v4i2/02.pdf>*

Q: Will the Minimum Requirements document be updated based on the updated ICF Core Competencies? If so, when?

Response: *As part of the next phase of work in assessment development, ICF will update the Minimum Skills Requirements for each credentialing level, which will provide guidance on the specific skills and behaviors that should be demonstrated for each competency.*

Q: Why do you call the updated Core Competencies a "model"?

Response: *In the domain of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, where this work frequently lies, a set of competencies are often called a model or framework. The words*

framework and model can be used interchangeably.

Q: Why isn't co-creating mentioned more in the updated Core Competencies? Is "partnering" the same thing as co-creating?

Response: *The updated Core Competencies include a focus on the importance of a coach partnering with their client. In the development of the updated Core Competencies, the ICF used the following definition of partnership: a coach and client coming together to develop a working relationship in which both parties work toward a common client-centric goal.*

Q: How does this impact ICF PCC Marker Training?

Response: *ICF will be updating the PCC Markers to ensure alignment with the structure of the updated Core Competencies. We anticipate completing this work in late-2020 and will offer additional training to individuals who have already completed the PCC Marker training program.*

Q: Will there be updates to the PCC Markers? What is the timeline for all of this?

Response: *ICF will be updating the PCC Markers to ensure alignment with the structure of the updated Core Competencies. We anticipate completing this work late-2020 and will offer additional training to individuals who have already completed the PCC Marker training program.*

Q: What are the PCC Markers?

Response: *The PCC markers are descriptive, behavioral indicators that should be exhibited in a coaching conversation at the Professional Certified Coach (PCC) level. These markers support a performance evaluation process that is fair, consistent, valid, reliable, repeatable and defensible. The PCC Markers are available on the ICF website at <https://coachfederation.org/pcc-markers>.*

Q: Some of the PCC Markers are found in the updated Core Competencies. Is that being viewed as a validation of those behavioral markers?

Response: *The job analysis research verified, or validated, many of the PCC markers.*

Q: What changes will be made to the performance evaluation? When will the updated Core Competencies be integrated into the new performance assessments for Credentialing? Will the current Core Competencies be used in the meantime?

Response: *The next phase of our work will be the development of new assessment processes that are in alignment with the updated Core Competencies. We expect to launch assessments that align with the updated Core Competencies in the second half of 2021. Until then, we will continue to use the current Core Competencies and current assessment process for all those seeking ICF credentials.*

Q: There is a concern that the competency of Powerful Questioning has been diluted by being combined into Evokes Awareness. How did the decision come about to take the emphasis off Powerful Questioning as a separate Core Competencies?

Response: *A significant amount of data from the job analysis showed that coaches use many techniques to evoke awareness, not just powerful questions. Therefore, it was important to*

reflect this in the updated Core Competencies.

Q: Will coaches who have already received a credential have to pass another assessment?

Response: *Those who hold an ICF credential will not be required to complete a new version of the exam. However, following the launch of new assessments in the second half of 2021, individuals who choose to pursue a new ICF credential may be required to take a new version of the exam.*

Q: Does ICF expect recent graduates of coach training programs to incorporate the updated Core Competencies in order to get a credential? Will ICF provide training to help inform coaches about the updated Core Competencies?

Response: *While coach specific training programs may wish to begin using the updated Core Competencies at any time, ICF assessments for credential applicants will continue to be based on the current Core Competencies until the second half of 2021. As stated in the webinars, virtually all of the concepts of the current model exist in the updated Core Competencies and those trained using the current model should be able to perform well on future assessments based on the updated model.*

Q: What is the definition of "reflective practice"?

Response: *Reflective practice involves taking time in the moment or considering interactions in the past to understand how the interactions played out or might be playing out in the moment. This practice will also provide an opportunity for the individual to accurately appraise their involvement in the interaction and choose appropriate behaviors. Further information can be found in the research paper here: <http://philosophyofcoaching.org/v4i2/02.pdf>*

Q: How will reflective practice be assessed?

Response: *During our work to develop new assessments we will be exploring ways to assess a candidate's understanding of reflective practice through revised assessments aligned with the updated Core Competencies, including both knowledge-based and performance assessments. While this may be difficult to determine through a performance assessment, a candidate's understanding of and ability to apply knowledge related to reflective practice may more easily be determined through a knowledge-based exam.*

Q: How can I get a copy of the study on reflective practice?

Response: *You can download the research paper here: <http://philosophyofcoaching.org/v4i2/02.pdf>*

Q: How will this affect credential renewals?

Response: *Individuals who hold an active ICF Credential and wish to renew that credential will not be required to pass a new assessment reflecting the updated Core Competencies. Any ICF Credential holder who allows their credential to expire, or a Credential holder who wishes to upgrade to a higher level credential, will be required to pass a new credentialing assessment.*

Q: To what degree did existing research inform this research?

Response: *Additional research we had previously conducted that was used in the updated Core Competencies development included: our reflective practice model, a study of how coaches develop expertise, statistical evidence on how managers and leaders use coaching skills, as well as statistical data from credential assessments.*

Q: What organization did the ICF partner with to conduct the job analysis?

Response: *Two PhD-level industrial and organizational psychologists from HumRRO (Human Resources Research Organization) assisted us in this work. One of the psychologists holds an ACC credential.*

Q: What was the approximate distribution of level of credential holder in the workshops and survey respondents? Did the analysis include coaches who are not affiliated with ICF or trained by ICF programs?

Response: *Workshops: MCC 17, PCC 11, ACC 3, no credential 8. Survey respondents: MCC 9%, PCC 34%, ACC 31%, no ICF credential 26%. We intentionally included participants who were not previously involved with ICF in order to get a fresh perspective.*

Q: Will a report of the research data be available?

Response: *We are in the process of revising an article on the Core Competencies update for an academic journal and will make it available once it is published.*

Q: Can you talk more about managing emotions?

Response: *Being able to regulate or manage your own emotions can be an important element of staying present for your client. Inability to manage emotions can reduce your ability to develop creative and thoughtful steps to facilitate client learning. Reflective practice can be a good way to enhance self-regulation.*

Q: Is Coaching Supervision considered a type of reflective practice?

Response: *Reflective practice can certainly be a significant part of coaching supervision, however not all supervision is reflective practice.*

Q: Will ICF be developing Team Coaching competencies?

Response: *We have a research study on team coaching in progress.*

Q: Can you provide a document with a timeline for all of these changes?

Response: *Yes, slides from this webinar, including the timeline for implementation of the updated Core Competencies, are available for download at <https://coachfederation.org/core-competencies>.*

Q: Will the use of tools and techniques now be acceptable in MCC performance assessments?

Response: *ICF is currently working with its research partners at HumRRO and subject matter expert (SME) volunteers to update the Credentialing assessments to integrate the updated Core Competencies. As part of this work, ICF will address updates to the performance evaluation, as well, including the Minimum Skills Requirements at each credentialing level. Updated assessments are anticipated to be released in the second half of 2021; in the meantime, the existing Credentialing assessments using the current Core Competencies will remain in use.*

Q: How will the updated Core Competencies have to be integrated into coach training program curriculum? What is the timeline for this? Can we start incorporating the updated model into our curriculum now?

Response: *ICF Accredited Coach Training Programs will be required to integrate the updated Core Competencies into their training curricula by 2021, as part of the incremental renewal process. Training programs that are applying for ICF accreditation will be required to reflect the updated ICF Core Competencies in training curricula beginning in 2021. Training programs are able to integrate the updated Core Competencies prior to the 2021 deadline, however.*

Q: When will translated versions of the Core Competencies be available?

Response: *Translations of the updated Core Competencies are available in French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish at <https://coachfederation.org/core-competencies>.*

Q: Is it acceptable to start using the updated Core Competencies in our coaching?

Response: *Yes. While there are some important revisions in the updated Core Competencies, virtually every concept included in the original Core Competencies remain in the updated model. In other words, the original and updated Core Competencies are not in conflict with one another and coaches may begin using the updated Competencies in their coaching.*

Q: How can I volunteer my expertise and be more involved with ICF?

Response: *If you are interested in future volunteer opportunities within the ICF ecosystem, please complete a brief form here at <https://coachfederation.org/leading-the-future-of-coaching>. A member of the ICF staff team will contact you if we identify a volunteer opportunity that aligns with your interests and skills.*

Q: Why did ICF decide to conduct a job analysis?

Response: *An important element of any credentialing program is to periodically review the work of practitioners to ensure that the credentialing program accurately assesses the work done by the practitioners of that profession and that the competencies remain relevant and useful. Best practice calls for organizations that issue credentials to conduct a job analysis every 5 to 7 years. ICF last conducted a job analysis in 2009 and recognized that since that time there had likely been changes in the practice of coaching that needed to be reflected in the competences used to train and assess coaches.*