

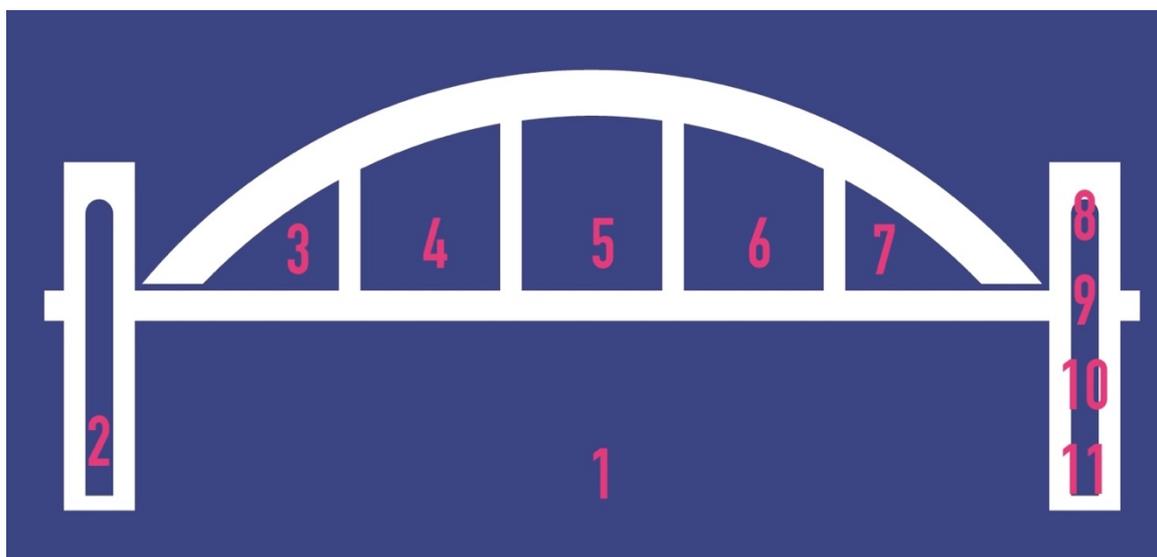
Competency Bridge Model[©]

I have been training coaches for the last 11 years, and during that time one of the biggest challenges has been how to explain and share the real purpose and essence of the ICF core competencies to our students. Having completed both the ICF PCC Assessor training and also as I prepare for the MCC credential, I have taken the opportunity and really enjoyed the necessity of a truly deep dive into the competencies and markers.

Let me say up front, I have never been a big fan of coaching models - as much as they can be helpful, I frequently felt restricted by the idea of following them. I know many coaches enjoy the structure that many models provide, and that wasn't me. At the same time I saw the ICF core competencies as a kind of model in themselves, offering the flesh and bones of a professional coaching relationship and service, and the vital core of good coaching. Maybe it is because they are aimed more at coaches than clients that they are less well used than some of the fancy acronyms for self-marketing?

A few months ago as I was once again explaining to a new cohort of our International ACTP programme the competencies, they suddenly became really visual for me. It feels like a powerful breakthrough that I want to share with you.

I saw a strong and simple bridge, spanning a river.



Below the bridge, the riverbed itself is the 1st competency: Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards. On one side is the first pillar. It holds the competency 2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement. Together they create ICF's section A. "Setting the Foundation".

Without the foundations we simply cannot talk about coaching - whatever happens without setting them in a professional way, what occurs could be called a discussion, supporting dialogue or a friendly chat, but not coaching. Without it, we do not have a mutual agreement on why we're here and what we want, neither the how we'll get there. There is no safety created, no goals and no framework. The client cannot know what to expect from the process and of us.

My experience as a coach trainer is that it takes quite a while for students to really grasp the value in proper contracting, same for many clients. It can seem difficult to spend time there, both parties impatient to start “real” coaching, i.e. jump to the topic of the session. Yet, the necessity is normally proven by the end of the session which can end in vague results, normally not happy clients and somewhat frustrated coaches.

On the other side of the river is the second pillar.

The second pillar is ICF’s section D. “Facilitating Learning and Results” that includes:

8. Creating Awareness
9. Designing Actions
10. Planning and Goal Setting
11. Managing Progress and Accountability

Quite similar to the attitude toward “Setting the Foundation”, beginner coaches tend not to plan time and focus on the wrapping up of the session and can sometimes try to squeeze these 4 competencies into 2 minutes, something like: “How do you feel now?” and “So can we close our session?” If we have been working hard with our client for let’s say an hour or so, getting some good insights, new perspectives, increased energy for the client. Then we simply say good-bye, it is such a waste. For me it’s like working in the kitchen garden on a Sunday morning, then dropping everything and returning the house. The fruits left under the tree, veggies thrown to the edge of the beds - left for an unpredictable future of either being eaten by the owner (luck) or rotting or being eaten by birds. How much better is it if we stop “working” just a bit earlier and collect with the client all the harvest (8)? This creates real satisfaction and deep level learning. Then we have a chance to discuss what the client feels they would like to do with the harvest (9): make a jam, cook a nice dinner or sell them at the local market. All we have to do afterwards is to support them to think through the future process of the chosen action (10 and 11). Thus we can say good-bye to a client whose basket is full with fruits, head and heart full with plans and energy.

So what about the other five competencies?

Namely section B. “Co-creating the Relationship” which includes

3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client
4. Coaching Presence

And also section C. “Communicating Effectively” with

5. Active Listening,
6. Powerful Questioning
7. Direct Communication

As I see them, the 2 outside pillars have a “timed” place in the session: opening and closing, with touches found in-between. Competencies 3 to 7 are different. They are used through-out the session and all along the process, like the span of the bridge. They help us actually cross the water and create a safe and challenging learning environment

for the client. Sometimes they can be really subtle and unobtrusive and might nearly go unnoticed, to an untrained eye. They are not necessarily harsh, nor obvious, they can be like a piece of art. However, their importance cannot be stressed enough, as they are the juice and the sauce of the coaching relationship. They are skills, competencies, attitude, values, mindset, focus, sensing, curiosity, connecting to the client and so much more.

I never thought that one day I'd be passionate about a set of professional competencies. It arrived as my own identity as a coach trainer strengthened and deepened over the years. I now teach at 2 ACTP programmes, for both International and local Hungarian student coaches. Witnessing them all so wanting to learn, putting in so much effort. Seeing them try, fail, experiment and then succeed and finally excel at PCC level, has made me deeply curious as to how to make their learning smoother, more efficient and more effective. This is how potentially dry words on a page of definitions became a vivid and living picture full of energy and meaning.

The Core Competencies are the intellectual property of the International Coach Federation.

Budapest, on the 6th of February 2019

Dora Hegedus PCC

Co-founder and trainer of the Coach Academy ACTP (Hungary) and Bossert International Executive Coach Training ACTP (EMEA)

<https://www.hegedusdora.hu/welcome>