

Coaching psychology: Exploring definitions and research contribution to practice?

Jonathan Passmore & Yi-Ling Lai

This paper aims to provide an analytic review of contemporary coaching evidence and future research directions through reviewing the development of coaching (e.g. executive, health and life coaching) and coaching psychology definitions. We offer alternative perspectives from psychologist and non-psychologist coaching practice in the development of both traditions over the past two decades. As part of this paper we will summarise systematic reviews and meta-analyses in workplace coaching and outline the key messages for evidence-based practice. Three key messages are identified from this review. First, coaching itself is a professional helping relationship since the process mainly relies on reciprocal actions between the coach and coachee. Second, coachees should be placed in the centre of the coaching relationship, recognising their motivation to change is the essential antecedent for coaching success. Third, social psychological perspectives are an important element in dyadic coaching interactions. Our aim in this paper is to encourage coaching scholars and practitioners towards future research collaborations in the interest of developing evidenced based practice in coaching.

Keywords: Coaching, coaching psychology, health coaching, executive coaching, analytic literature review, coaching pedagogy.

Introduction

SINCE COACHING started its journey of development as a separate discipline in the early 1980s (Brock, 2012; Passmore & Theeboom, 2016); definitions of coaching have been part of the debate within coaching practice and research, across the literature from practitioner's guides to academic texts. While there has been broad agreement over these years, the focus and emphasis has varied reflecting the orientation and focus of different writers (e.g. Whitmore, 1992; Grant & Palmer, 2002; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

The search for a formal definition of coaching may be considered to be an academic pursuit. However, Grant (2011) argues that a clear definition is needed for the purpose of the development of evidence-based practice, such as coach training and education. Summarising from previous discussions on

the need for a standardised coaching definition, we conclude that marking the boundaries of a domain is vital for three reasons. First, it is essential for practice, a standardised definition of an intervention makes it clear to clients what they can expect from a service provider (their coach), namely a regulated professional service. This view is shared by the International Coach Federation (ICF), who encourage coaches to include an exploration of the nature of coaching during the contracting phase with clients, ensuring both have a shared understanding of the process and what the client can expect (ICF, 2017). Second, it's vital for research. We need to clearly delineate the domain to understand the phenomena being studied. As coaching is still an emerging research domain, it is crucial to define the key components to differentiate coaching from other similar helping interventions (e.g. counselling) and provide a platform

from which theoretical contributions can develop. Third, a consistent definition is vital for coaching education and qualification; with a scientific-based framework to support its pedagogy. Meanwhile, we consider a distinct description and characterisation of coaching helps us to have a better understanding of whether coaching psychology is a unique discipline, and what the essential body of knowledge is to support its theoretical domain.

This paper starts with reviewing the definitions of coaching following with the distinctions between sub-specialised practices under coaching, such as executive, health and life coaching. In addition, we also provide a comparative analysis to differentiate coaching from other similar professional helping interventions (e.g. counselling). Moreover, we summarise the interpretations of psychology-based coaching approaches considering that the term, coaching psychology, has been used and perceived as a developed (or developing) discipline in some regions (e.g. Australia and UK). Nevertheless, it is still not widely accepted or used in other parts of the world. Therefore, we attempt to clarify whether the theoretical foundation of what so called 'coaching psychology' is different to coaching and what the body of knowledge is under its domain from existing research evidence through reviewing the most used definitions. The term 'coaching psychology' is used hereafter to maintain the consistency in this paper. Finally, we integrate key perspectives and finding from recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses on coaching to consider psychological contribution to coaching practice.

Defining coaching

Grant (2001) indicated the first reference to coaching in the workplace dates back to 1937. This has subsequently been cited by multiple research papers over the past two decades. The paper, a journalist's report by C.B Gordy, the Detroit editor of *Factory Management and Maintenance*, examined

the role of worker development (through training and coaching) to improve factory processes. The journalist offered little in the way of a formal definition of coaching. In fact, the only reference to coaching by Gordy comes at the very end of the paper: '*whereas supervisors found it advisable in the early years to coach employees in the importance of spoiled work and cost reduction, it is now found the older men voluntarily assume this task in training the younger employees*' (Gordy, 1937, p.83). Gordy appeared to suggest that coaching and training are almost synonymous, with a progress from what might be a short and informal approach to training (coaching) to a more formal training intervention.

Our own literature search, using the term 'coaching' through the Henley One database which searches multiple business databases, has revealed earlier references to the term. As early as 1911 the term was being used in journals to reflect its use as an educational tool within university and school debating societies; helping members improve their debating skills (Trueblood, 1911; Huston, 1924). As with Gordy, there is little description in these papers of the process, nor explicit definition of the term. Also like Gordy, the term appears to be used inter-changeably with training. More workplace coaching papers continued during the 1930s (Bigelow, 1938). At the same time sports coaching was developing too, where the first connections were made between coaching and psychology (Griffiths, 1926). But these works were relatively few and far between, until the eruption of coaching in the 1980s.

As the literature evolved from a sporadic collection of papers, often with little if any definition of terms, Whitmore's seminal book placed a marker in the sand, and provides a clear definition of coaching. For Whitmore, coaching was about '*unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them – a facilitation approach*' (Whitmore, 1992, p.8). Whitmore drew heavily on Timothy Gallwey's inner game model. Gallwey had noted in sport performance that

the internal state of a player was a significant factor. He went further to argue that it was more significant even than the opponent in individual sports like tennis and golf. If the individual could control their self-talk, sizable performance gains could be made (Gallwey, 1986) At the core of coaching for John Whitmore was a belief that the purpose of coaching was helping individuals develop greater self-awareness and personal responsibility: *'Performance coaching is based on awareness and responsibility'* (Whitmore, 1992, p.173).

Other founding writers offered alternative definitions. Laura Whitworth one of the pioneers in the US, along with Thomas Leonard (Brook, 2009), developed co-active coaching which defined coaching as *'a relationship of possibilities... based on trust, confidentiality'* (Whitworth, 1998).

These perspectives highlighted the nature of the coaching process and its dependency on people, interpersonal interactions and collaboration. This relational aspect distinguishes coaching from other tutoring, or training interventions, where arguably knowledge exchange is at the heart of the process and has led to one stream of coaching research focusing on interpersonal and relational aspects, in the belief that if the relationship is sound, effective outcomes will result.

Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) offered a more process-based definition in an attempt to differentiate coaching from mentoring, counselling and other conversation-based approaches to change. They suggested coaching involved *'a Socratic based dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (client) where the majority of interventions used by the facilitator are open questions which are aimed at stimulating the self awareness and personal responsibility of the participant'*.

Bachkirova et al. (2010) have suggested that coaching is *'a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee...'* (Bachkirova et al., 2010, p.1). While Lai (2014) suggested coaching is defined as a

'reflective process between coaches and coachees which helps or facilitates coachees to experience positive behavioural changes through continuous dialogue and negotiations with coaches to meet coachees' personal or work goals'. Again, positive behavioural changes are pointed out as the main purpose of coaching, with a recognition that a structured process is involved. Moreover, 'negotiation' is put forward in Lai's re-interpretation of coaching that reflects back the previous definitions, coaching is a relationship-based learning and development process.

Sub-specialised practices under coaching

As the coaching industry has grown, definitions have split into a series of sub-sets of coaching. These have included 'executive coaching', 'health coaching', 'life coaching'. The following sections summarise the definitions and characteristics of these most prevalent sub-specialised areas of coaching.

Executive coaching

The application of coaching in the workplace and specifically with senior managers has led to the development of what has been labeled executive coaching. At its simplest executive coaching could be defined as coaching for senior, or c-suite, managers. Kilburg suggested executive coaching was distinctive in being *'a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement'* (Kilburg, 1996, p.142)

Similarly, de Haan et al. (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch & Jones, 2013), echoing earlier relational definitions, indicated executive coaching is a relationship-focused development intervention. Their research and practice perceive executive coaching as a form of leadership development that takes

place through a series of contracted, one-to-one conversations, with a qualified ‘coach.’ The process itself is tailored to individuals, so that they learn and develop through the reflective conversation, but that such learning occurred because of the unique relationship based on trust, safe, and support.

Both definitions highlight the professional working relationship in the coaching process and the importance of ‘contracting’ beforehand. However, the definition by de Haan et al. (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch & Jones, 2013) specifies the term ‘qualified coach’ which raises the awareness of a ‘standard’ coaching qualification. Given that de Haan’s own background as facilitator and coach trainer, this is not surprising, but his definition opens up the discussion, what does ‘qualified coach’ mean and who decides.

Health coaching

A further strand that has emerged and is continuing to grow in popularity is health coaching. The approach has grown in both the UK, within the National Health Service (NHS) (Evidence Centre, 2014), in the US through private providers and globally. A literature review identified 275 published studies, with the approach now widely used by nurses, doctors and allied health professionals such as physiotherapists and health advisors (Evidence Centre, 2014).

The study defined health coaching as: *‘a patient-centred process that is based upon behaviour change theory and is delivered by health professionals with diverse backgrounds. The actual health coaching process entails goal setting determined by the patient, encourages self-discovery in addition to content education, and incorporates mechanisms for developing accountability in health behaviours’* (Evidence Centre, 2014, p.3).

A similar definition was offered by Palmer, Stubbs and Whybrow (2003), who defined health coaching as *‘the practice of health education and health promotion within a coaching context, to enhance the wellbeing of individuals and to facilitate the achievement of their health-related goals’* (Palmer, Stubbs & Whybrow, 2003, p.91). The distinction being

the focus on self-discovery, which echoes Whitmore’s primary aims of coaching: self-awareness and personal responsibility.

However, what is less clear from these definitions is where health coaching starts and finishes. If coaching is employed to help individuals with chronic conditions and to improve health outcomes, does this include approaches such as motivational interviewing, which are widely used for drug and alcohol treatment, or brief solution focus therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy, which might be considered to be included within the definitions above, but which the practitioner delivering it might consider to be counselling or therapy. This lack of a more clearly defined boundary has made it difficult to study and compare coaching interventions within this health (Boehmer et al., 2016).

One useful, although controversial, distinction we have offered is to use the time focus of the conversation, with coaching focused on future behavioural change for health improvement, while counseling or therapy focus on coping with, managing or making sense of the past.

Life coaching

Like health coaching, life coaching has become a popular means of helping non-clinical populations in setting and reaching goals and enhancing their wellbeing (Green, Oades & Grant, 2006).

Life coaching can be broadly defined as a collaborative solution focused, result-orientated and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of life experience and goal attainment in the personal and/or professional life of normal, non-clinical clients (Grant, 2014). In other words life coaching has often been considered to be coaching outside of the work arena, for example in education (Green, Grant & Rynsaardt, 2007) or coaching for wellbeing (Green, Oades & Grant, 2006).

One possible distinction between life coaching and health coaching is that while health coaching is often defined in terms of

the qualification of those providing it: health coaching is coaching delivered by health professionals, while life coaching is delivered by those outside of the health sector. In the UK and Australia, the term itself has slipped in popularity being replaced by the term wellbeing coaching. Although the term life coaching remains popular in North America, coaching continues to grow and spread to new areas beyond business and sports to areas including driving development (Passmore & Rehman, 2012; Wilmott & Wilmott, 2018), safety coaching (Passmore, Krauesslar & Avery, 2015), maternity and childcare (Golawski et al., 2013) and marital relationships (Williams & Williams, 2011; Ives & Cox, 2015).

Reflections of the developing nature of coaching definitions

Reflecting back on the wide-ranging definitions, a common theme is the facilitative nature of coaching. First, the role of the agent (the coach) is not to guide, direct or instruct, but to 'facilitate'. The process is to support the client (coachee) in new discoveries, insights and move closer to their goals. A second observation from reviewing these multiple definitions is that coaching has been refined and redefined continually over this period as it has changed, developed and spread into new areas. This brings not only challenges, but could also be considered to be coaching's strength, reflecting a vibrant, dynamic and developing area of practice. As Palmer and Whybrow note '*definitions seldom stay static, unless the area has stagnated*' (2007, p.3).

The situation has been less fluid in coaching psychology. While there have been various definitions of coaching psychology offered since the turn of the millennium, the variety and volume of change has been markedly different, with only two or three alternative definitions offered in publications (Passmore et al., 2013).

The differences between coaching and other helping interventions

One way of understanding the essential defining elements of coaching is a comparison

to other relevant facilitation activities. Traditionally, coaching has been compared to therapy/counselling and mentoring (Bachkirova, 2008) because they share very similar features and process. In this discussion we also include a discussion about organisational change. Various writers have discussed the key similarities and differences among coaching, therapy/counselling, mentoring and change agent (e.g. Bachkirova, 2008; Leonard et al., 2013). Table 1 on pp.73–74 summarises the key features subsequent to reviewing a number of related papers and book chapters (Joo, 2005; Gray, 2006; Bachkirova, 2008; McDowall & Mabey, 2008; Passmore et al., 2013).

Coaching compared to counselling/therapy

The need for a clearer differentiation between counselling/therapy and coaching is emerging as the use of psychological models and tools in coaching interventions has increased considerably (Bachkirova, 2008). Such a differentiation is essential to ensure a quality coaching engagement if the clearer orientation and required knowledge are defined in the coaching evaluation and training agenda. The similarities between the counselling/therapy and coaching domains are that both are concerned with the 'relationship', there is a need for engagement or 'client's/coachee's commitment' and both rely on the 'practitioner's (coaches) self-awareness' to facilitate both the relationship and keep the conversation moving forward. In both cases the aim is to facilitate a person's change through an interpersonal interactive process, the relationship between practitioner and client and how the practitioner facilitates an effective relationship are essential for a positive outcome. In addition, the counselling/therapy and coaching principle share a number of basic required professional skills such as listening, questioning, summaries, reflection and affirmations.

We suggest that there are at least three differentiating aspects. First, the initial

Table 1: The differences and similarities between coaching other similar professional helping interventions

Aspects	Counselling/ Therapy	Coaching	Mentoring	Change agent
Ultimate purpose and benefits.	Development and wellbeing of individual.	Development and wellbeing of individual (if sponsored, also benefit for the sponsoring organisation).	Development and wellbeing of individual (if sponsored, also benefit for the sponsoring organisation).	Development and organisational change.
Initial motivation.	Eliminating psychological problem and dysfunctions.	Enhancing life, improving performance.	Enhancing life, improving performance.	Enhancing life, improving performance at the workplace.
Context of interventions.	Open to any and potentially to all areas of client's life.	Specified by the contract according to the client's goals, the coach's area of expertise and the assignment of a sponsor if involved.	Specified by the contract according to the client's goals, the coach's area of expertise and the assignment of a sponsor if involved.	Specified by the contract according to the client's goals, the coach's area of expertise and the assignment of a sponsor if involved.
Client's expectations for change.	From high dissatisfaction to reasonable satisfaction.	From relative satisfaction to much higher satisfaction.	From relative satisfaction to much higher satisfaction.	From relative satisfaction to much higher satisfaction.
Possible outcome.	Increased wellbeing, unexpected positive changes in various areas of life.	Attainment of goals, increased wellbeing and productivity.	Attainment of goals, increased wellbeing and productivity.	Attainment of goals, increased wellbeing and productivity.
Theoretical foundation	Psychology and philosophy.	May include psychology, education, sociology, philosophy, management, health and social care etc.	May include psychology, education, sociology, philosophy, management, health and social care etc.	May include psychology, education, sociology, philosophy, management and organisational change theories etc.

(Revised from Joo, 2005; Gray, 2006; Bachkirova, 2008; McDowall & Mabey, 2008; Passmore et al., 2013)

Table 1 (continued)

Aspects	Counselling/ Therapy	Coaching	Mentoring	Change agent
Main professional skills	Listening, questioning, feedback, use of tools and methods specific to particular approaches.	Listening, questioning, feedback, use of tools and methods specific to particular approaches.	Listening, questioning, feedback, use of tools and methods specific to particular approaches.	Listening, questioning, feedback, use of tools and methods specific to particular approaches.
Importance of relationship in the process.	High.	High.	High.	High.
Importance of the client's commitment	High.	High.	High.	High.
Role of the practitioner's self in the process.	Very important.	Very important.	Important.	Less important.
Degree of formality.	High.	High.	Less formal.	High.
Frequency.	Variable, but usually several sessions needed based on client's individual situations.	Variable, but usually several sessions needed based on client's individual situations.	Variable, but usually several sessions needed based on client's individual situations.	Variable, usually based on the original contract with the organisation.
Ownership of data/feedback.	It is confidential data. Only shared between therapist and client.	Coach and individual, some data often shared with line manager. It depends on the agreed contract.	Mentor and the mentee. Some data and information are shared with the organisation based on the initial agreement.	Most of the data and information are shared with the organisation.

motivation of clients to undertake counselling/therapy is different from coaching. For example, the individual usually expects to eliminate psychological problems and dysfunctions through counselling/therapy sessions. In this sense it may be considered to be primarily problem focused. In contrast coaching clients are seeking more. The coachee arrives in anticipation of an improvement in personal and professional

development. In this sense it may be considered to be solution focused. Second, the focus of counselling/therapy may involve any matters relevant to the client's personal well-being, while the coaching process is usually restricted to the agreed and contracted goals. The expected outcomes and evaluation methods are usually defined prior to the first session with the involved parties (e.g. coachee, supervisors and other stake-

holders). Third, the time horizon for the work is longer. While the coach may contract for four, six or possibly twelve sessions, the therapists, contracts week by week, with a view that it takes as long as it takes.

Coaching compared to mentoring

The similarity between coaching and mentoring is that they both provide a one-to-one relationship that is designed to enhance a person's career development (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). However, there are notable differences between these two activities. First, mentoring is a form of tutelage, which means a more senior or experienced mentor conveys knowledge and insight to a junior mentee about how to improve in a specific job, role, vocation or organisation. Passmore (2013) referred to the definition of mentoring from Eby, Rhodes and Allen (2007, p.16): workplace mentoring involves a relationship between a less experienced individual (protégé) and a more experienced person (the mentor), where the purpose is the personal and professional growth of the protégé. The mentor may be a peer at work, a supervisor, someone else within the organisation, but outside the protégé's chain of command. Both coaching and mentoring disciplines highlight the importance of 'relationship', however, coaching is typically conducted without the expectation of a more equal relationship between the two parties, with less focus on technical knowledge (Joo, 2005). Besides, the main purpose of coaching is considered to be on improving performance or workplace wellbeing through self-awareness and learning, whereas the purpose of mentoring varies widely from socialisation of newcomers to management development (Joo, 2005). Some have also argued that coaching also differentiates from mentoring in its use of a structured process, involving specific tools and assessments, to provide both awareness in the client and the development of specific plans for improvement (Joo, 2005), which is in turn reflected in the timelines, with

mentoring often running over several years and coaching over several months.

Coaching compared to change agent

A change agent is defined as being an individual who initiates and manages change in the organisation (Lunenburg, 2010). Similar to the coaching intervention, the change agent can be assigned from internal (e.g. managers or in-house HR professionals) or hired from external specialists (Tschirky, 2011). Integrating contemporary theoretical interpretations between the coach and change agent, these two roles share several common features and historical development processes. First, coaches and change agents are commissioned to transform individuals to fit into the norms (e.g. behaviours, attitudes, performance, thinking styles) of societies or organisations at the early stage of both practices (Bennis et al., 1969; Kilburg, 1996; Parsloe, 1999). A 'planned' change in the organisational setting is usually expected by the change agency (i.e. the sponsored organisation) back to the late 1950s (Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958). The primal definitions of coaching also emphasis on the purposes of coaching are related to 'corporate vision and goals', 'team performance', 'organisational productivity' and 'professional development' (Parsloe, 1996; Sperry, 2008). These descriptions of being a coach and change agent focus on the task, instead of people; and the process is viewed as an instrumental tool generating the conformity in the organisation. Nevertheless, a broader view of both practices is established alongside with the development of relevant theories, such as motivation to change. For instance, Zaltman and Duncan (1977) indicated the change agent is any individual who transforms the status quo even though the operation is not sanctioned. In addition, Caldwell (2003) indicates the role of change agents has been shifted away from a planned approach to change, with a bottom up approach advocated. Meanwhile, the objective of coaching is expanded from specific corporate-related goals to a stimulation of personal potential and responsibility (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

The evolution of both practices is grounded on that people's behavioural change is highly associated with their intention (i.e. motivation) to change (Webb & Sherran, 2006). Accordingly, the focus of changing process research transfers to change recipients' needs and intrinsic motivation in this changing and learning process. Second, facilitating a collaborative and equal working relationship is encouraged in both practices. Zaltman and Duncan's study (1977) indicates change agents are more likely to be effective if they keep a flexible working relationship with the change recipient; for instance, acknowledging their needs, maintaining a collaborative process and being receptive to new ideas. In the meantime, the quality of the professional helping relationship is recognised as an essential antecedent for positive coaching outcomes (Bozer & Jones, 2018; de Haan, Duckworth, Birch & Jones, 2013) through numerous primary studies. Third, psychology takes an essential part in both practices. The involvement of psychology in the change process can be traced back to 1970s. Several papers indicate change agents as 'consultants in behavioural clothing' or 'psychological consultants' (Reddin, 1971; Pearl, 1974).

The explicit inclusion of a psychological perspective within coaching can be attributed to Grant (2001). Following Grant's PhD (2001) the consideration of the psychological effects of coaching, both processes and outcomes have been a popular area of research (Bono et al., 2009; Smither, 2011). More recently several systematic reviews and meta-analyses have established psychological informed research at the vanguard of coaching research (Theeboom, Beersma & Vianen, 2014; Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). Nevertheless, in terms of practice some papers (e.g. Bono et al., 2009; Passmore, Palmer & Short, 2010) have argued that there is little evidence of differences in practice between coaching psychologists and non-psychological trained coaches. Despite these debates as to whether psychological training informs coaching practice, we would

argue there is little doubt that psychology theory, be it behavioural change theory or psychological theories of human relationships, have informed all coach training. The understanding of human behaviour, emotions, cognition and motivation are key skills for all coaches, not just psychologists. Fourthly, both practices involve managing a complex social context. According to O'Neill (2000), the change agent often has no direct authority over the implementer; therefore, it is a natural triangle working relationship between the sponsor-implementer-agent. A similar relationship exists in the coaching context. More and more coaching studies (Louis & Fatien Diochon, 2014; Ianiro, Lehmann-Willenbrock & Kauffled 2015; Shoukry and Cox, 2018) have acknowledged the significance of the social dynamic in the coaching process. For example, Ianiro and Kauffled's study (2015) highlighted the importance of interpersonal interactions between the coach and coachee and how these are altered by different social circumstance.

Defining coaching psychology

Given this debate the question remains, what, if anything, is the difference between coaching and coaching psychology? At its birth, coaching psychology's Godfather, Anthony Grant, offered a definition of coaching psychology that subsequently established the foundation of coaching psychology definition within the British Psychology Society. According to Grant (2001, p.10):

'Coaching psychology can provide a useful platform from which to investigate the psychological factors involved in purposeful, directed behavioural change in normal populations, and in this way further the contribution of psychology to the enhancement of performance, productivity and quality of life of individuals, organizations and the broader social community.'

In Grant's (2001) definition coaching psychology is:

1. An empirically-validated framework of

- change which facilitates the coaching process.
2. A model of self-regulation which allows delineation of the processes inherent in self-regulation, goal setting and goal attainment.
 3. A methodology of how behaviour, thoughts and feelings interact, and how behaviour, thoughts and feelings can be altered to facilitate goal attainment.

Drawing on Grant's PhD thesis, Palmer and Whybrow reformulated the definition for the British Psychological Society SGCP. Coaching psychology is for: *'enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and work domains, underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established adult learning or psychological approaches'* (Palmer & Whybrow 2006).

Passmore (2010), as noted above, argued such definitions draw a false distinction between non-psychologist coaches and coaching psychologists. He argued that many coaches draw upon psychological models in their practice and that coach training has over the past two decades become more evidenced based approaches, thanks in part to the work of Grant, Cavanagh, Green, Bachkirova and Palmer, who have published widely, and argued the case for evidenced based coaching. Passmore's position appears to be supported by research evidence, which suggests in terms of behaviours (Jenkins, Passmore, Palmer & Short, 2012), and in wider practice (Passmore, Brown & Csigas, 2017), there is little difference between coaches and coaching psychologists and coaches.

In contrast to focusing on psychological approaches, he sought to recast coaching psychology as a separate domain of study, parallel to occupational, health or forensic psychology. He defined coaching psychology as *'the scientific study of behaviour, cognitive and emotion within coaching practice to deepen our understanding and enhance our practice within coaching'* (Passmore, 2010, p.4).

Passmore suggested that while there are few observable differences between coaches and

coaching psychologists in their practice, the study of psychology can enhance practice, and may lead to materially different outcomes. This view however remains the subject of debate. In this paper we might go further to suggest that coaching psychologists may be able to more clearly articulate what they do and the underpinning theory supporting their approach. Further, as a result of the robust ethical standards set by national psychological societies such as the British Psychological Society (BPS), Australian Psychological Society (APS), New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPS), Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), Canada Psychology Association (CPA) and American Psychological Association (APA), psychologists may act to raise ethical standards when working with coaching clients. This last point of course is highly contentious, given the complex, and diverse nature of ethics, what is ethical and the diversity of ethical standards between different coaching body members and different national cultures (Passmore, Brown & Csigas, 2017).

In response to an invitation (Passmore, Stopforth & Lai, 2018) researchers and practitioners have responded with their own definitions of coaching psychology. Our role here is not to suggest that one is right or wrong, but recognise that different traditions, cultural perspectives and working environments shape and influence these different perspectives. Our purpose is to simply bring these perspectives together as part of the debate.

Grant offers a fresh take from the vantage point of Australia. *'Coaching psychology is a branch of psychology that involves the systematic application of behavioural science to the attainment of professional or personal outcomes that are valued by the coachee. Such outcomes or goal typically focus on the enhancement of personal or professional life experience, work performance and/or well-being, and can be used for individuals, groups and/or organisations. Coaching does not aim to treat issues related to mental illness'* (Grant, Personal Communication 2018).

Michel Moral, a leading name in French coaching, research and practice, has suggested that *'coaching psychology is a way of doing coaching which uses and combines all the theatrical and*

technical resources of psychology in intrapersonal, interpersonal and systemic areas of knowledge. It allows the coach to be fully aware of what they are doing in service of the coaching mission' (Moral, Personal Communication 2018).

The South African Psychologists Coaching Group draw on the work of Odendaal, and Le Roux, (2016, p.3) in the following definition of coaching psychology: *'Coaching Psychology, as practiced by a registered practitioner, is a conversational process of facilitating positive development and change towards optimal functioning, well-being and increased performance in the work and personal life domains, in the absence of clinically significant mental health issues, through the application of a wide range of psychological theories and principles. The intervention is action-orientated with measurable outcomes, and is also reflective towards creating greater self-awareness and meaning, and is directed at individuals, groups, teams, organisations and communities within a culturally-specific context'* (Gail C. Wrogemann, Chair Group Sub-Committee, PsySSA, Personal Communication, 2019).

The New Zealand Psychological Society Special Group use the following definition: *Coaching psychology... 'draws on and develops established psychological approaches, and [is] the systematic application of behavioural science to the enhancement of life experience, work performance and well-being for individuals, groups and organisations who do not have clinically significant mental health issues or abnormal levels of distress.'* (Jonathan Black, Co-Chair of CPSIG, Personal Communication, 2019).

While different psychological groups, and practitioners hold differing perspectives, a common feature is the link to psychological theory and a common purpose to promote evidence-based practice through a psychological understanding of what it is to be human, within a 'normal' (non-clinical) range of functioning.

Coaching psychology is 'the well' which refreshes the wider coaching profession. It is the heart of scientific enquiry about coaching practice for work with non-clinical populations and while practices may not diverge, understanding of psychological

theory, ethical standards and contribution to research, mark coaching psychologist, and coaching psychology apart.

Key findings from recent systematic reviews on coaching psychology

While the on-going debates between the psychologists and non-psychologists have continued, several systematic reviews on coaching psychology have identified key factors for a positive coaching outcome (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). First, the working alliance which refers to the quality and strength of the collaborative relationship between the client and therapist (Hatcher & Barends, 2006) has been recognised as a key indicator of coaching outcomes (Lai & McDowall, 2014; Grover & Furnham, 2016). Second, self-efficacy which focuses on how individuals perceive their acquisition of a skill or knowledge (Gist & Mitchell, 1992) has been found to be an important antecedent of affective coaching outcomes as reflected in perceived coaching effectiveness (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch & Jones, 2013; de Haan, Grant, Burger & Eriksson, 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018). Third, the coachee's readiness to change (i.e. motivation to change) is a critical variable to outcomes (Bozer & Jones, 2018). Moreover, the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Aryee, Budhwar & Chen, 2002), which explains the support from the coachee's leader and organisation to their coachee, has a key role to play in outcomes (Bozer & Jones, 2018).

Summarising from these critical reviews on existing coaching evidence, we can conclude psychology continues to play a significant part in shaping contemporary coaching research, specifically, frameworks from psychotherapy (e.g. the working alliance framework) and organisational psychology (e.g. motivational theory and LMX). As coaching research continues, we suspect that the contribution of both psychological theory and psychological research methods will inform and shape the development of evidence based coaching practice. Secondly, that evidenced based practice will increasingly become the core modality for

qualified coaching practitioners, as the draw from the well of coaching psychology research.

Discussion

This review paper answers several questions on contemporary coaching study, practice and the need for coach's training and development. We can initially conclude that coaching intervention cannot be detached from psychological perspectives in considering that the main activity embedded in the coaching process relies on 'interpersonal interactions', such as dialogues and conversations. In addition, some research (Ianiro et al., 2015) indicated 'body languages' and 'unspoken manners' between the coaching dyad act a key role for a successful coaching outcome. Therefore, the psychological professional relationship is embedded in all coaching setting, regardless of the technique or framework.

Second, most of the current research evidence indicated theories in psychotherapy, such as therapeutic working alliance, provides a theoretical foundation in coaching alliance study. Nevertheless, social psychological perspectives are highlighted in recent coaching research domain due to the power dynamics and cultural differences in most of the coaching contexts (e.g. hierarchy in the social settings of coaches and expectations in different cultural backgrounds). Moreover, motivational theories which are usually studied in organisational psychology and adult learning areas are identified as the fundamental factor for an effective coaching alliance. Therefore, building trust and rapport at the beginning of the coaching relationship is the key to open up the coachee's mind and enhance their motivation to change. Consequently, we argue that while psychology is not the only theoretical discipline to facilitate an effective coaching process and outcome, it plays an essential part in this human-relationship focused intervention.

Conclusions

The evidence for investment in coaching intervention will continue to be a major concern for scholars in relevant domains,

as well as for organisational stakeholders. While, the development of coaching has been transformed from a 'business model or service' (Briner, 2012) towards a more scientific rooted profession, more rigorous research is still required to inform practice.

Coaching research has evolved from the 'infant' stage and has moved towards its teenage years. It has established that coaching works and produces moderate effect sizes (Theeboom et al., 2014). Further, it has a role beyond the coaching dyad, such as sponsoring organisations, cultural influences and coachees' social environments (Passmore & Theeboom, 2016). Its next stage of development must be to identify the active ingredients in coaching, and measure what effect each has. Secondly, it must start to differentiate between individuals and presenting problems. What type of coaching fits what type of person and what type of issue. To suggest that all are equal (Kilburg, 2005) is not supported by the growing evidence from other behavioural change domains, such as motivational interview (MI) and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). These have shown that different approaches can be better suited to specific types of presenting problem. We hypothesise that coaching will find that personality factors of the coach and coachee, as well as presenting problems and levels of readiness to change all influence outcomes: My coaching need, is not your coaching need. To move closer to this understanding a renewed energy is needed, with closer collaborative between coaching psychologists with the research skills and coaching practitioners to deliver the hundreds of data points needed for this type of research to bear fruit. If the past 15 years of coaching psychology have been growing and learning, the coming decade of coaching psychology will be a coming of age.

Jonathan Passmore, Henley Business School, University of Reading

Yi-Ling Lai, University of Portsmouth

References

- Athanasopoulou, A. & Dopson, S. (2018). A systematic review of executive coaching outcomes: Is it the journey or the destination that matters the most? *Leadership Quarterly*, 29(1), 70–88.
- Aryee, S., Budhwar, P.S. & Chen, Z.X. (2002). Trust as a mediator of the relationship between organizational justice and work outcomes: Test of a social exchange model. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behaviour*, 23(3), 267–285.
- Bachkirova, T. (2008). Role of coaching psychology in defining boundaries between counselling and coaching. In S. Palmer & A. Whybrow (Eds.) *Handbook of coaching psychology: A guide for practitioners* (2nd edn, pp.351–366). Hove: Routledge.
- Bachkirova, T., Cox, E. & Clutterbuck, D. (2010). *The complete handbook of coaching*. London: Sage.
- Bennis, W.G., Benne, K.D. & Chin, R. (1969). *The planning of change*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc.
- Bigelow, B. (1938). Building an effective training program for field salesmen. *Personnel*, 14, 142–150.
- Boehmer, K.R., Barakat, S., Ahn, S., Prokop, L.J., Erwin, P.J. & Murad, M.H. (2016). Health coaching interventions for persons with chronic conditions: A systematic review and meta-analysis protocol. *Systematic Reviews*, 5(1), 146.
- Bono, J., Purvanova, R., Towler, A. & Peterson, D. (2009). A survey of executive coaching practices. *Personnel Psychology*, 62(2), 361–404.
- Bozer, G. & Jones, R.J. (2018). Understanding the factors that determine workplace coaching effectiveness: A systematic literature review. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(3), 342–361.
- Briner, R. (2012). Does coaching work and does anyone really care? *OP Matters*, 17, 4–12.
- Brock, V. (2009). Coaching Pioneers: Laura Whitworth and Thomas Leonard. *International Journal of Coaching in Organisations I*(1), 54–64.
- Brock, V. (2012). *The sourcebook of coaching history* (2nd edn). Self published.
- Caldwell, R. (2003). Models of change agency: A fourfold classification. *British Journal of Management*, 14(2), 131–142.
- de Haan, E., Duckworth, A., Birch, D. & Jones, C. (2013). Executive coaching outcome research: The contribution of common factors such as relationship, personality match, and self-efficacy. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 65(1), 40.
- de Haan, E., Grant, A.M., Burger, Y. & Eriksson, P.-O. (2016). A large-scale study of executive and workplace coaching: The relative contributions of relationship, personality match, and self-efficacy. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 68, 189–207.
- Feldman, D.C. & Lankau, M.J. (2005). Executive coaching: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 829–848.
- Eby, L.T., Rhodes, J.E. & Allen, T.D. (2007). Definition and evolution of mentoring. *The Blackwell handbook of mentoring: A multiple perspectives approach*, pp.7–20. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Evidence Centre (2014). *Does health coaching work?* Retrieved on 10 January 2019 from <https://eoleadership.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/Does%20health%20coaching%20work%20-%20summary.pdf>
- Gallwey, T. (1986). *The inner game of tennis*. London: Pan.
- Golawski, A., Bamford, A. & Gersch, I. (2013). *Swings and roundabouts: A self coaching workbooks for parents and those considering becoming parents*. Abingdon: Karnac Books.
- Gordy, C. (1937). Everyone gets a share of the profits. *Factory Management & Maintenance*, 95, 82–83.
- Grant, A.M. (2001). *Toward a psychology of coaching: The impact of coaching on metacognition, mental health and goal attainment*. Sydney: Coaching Psychology Unit, University of Sydney.
- Grant, A. (2011). Developing an agenda for teaching coaching psychology. *International Coaching Psychology Review* 6(1), 84–99.
- Grant, A.M. & Palmer, S. (2002). Coaching Psychology. Meeting held at the Annual Conference of Division of Counselling Psychology, British Psychological Society, Torquay, 18 May.
- Grant, A. M. (2014). Autonomy support, relationship satisfaction and goal focus in the coach–coachee relationship: Which best predicts coaching success?. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 7(1), 18–38.

- Green, S. Anthony Grant, A.M. & Rynsaardt, J. (2007). Evidence-based life coaching for senior high school students: Building hardiness and hope. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2(1), 24–32.
- Green, L.S., Oades, L.G. & Grant, A.M. (2006). Cognitive-behavioural, solution-focused life coaching: Enhancing goal striving, well-being, and hope. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1(3), 142–149.
- Griffith, C.R. (1926). *Psychology of Coaching: A study of coaching methods from the point of view of psychology*. New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons.
- Grover, S. & Furnham, A. (2016). Coaching as a developmental intervention in organisations: A systematic review of its effectiveness and the mechanisms underlying it. *PLoS one*, 11(7), e0159137.
- Huston, R.E. (1924) Debate coaching in high school. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech Education*, 10, 127–143.
- Ianiro, P., Schermuly, C. & Kauffeld, S. (2013). Why interpersonal dominance and affiliation matter: An interaction analysis of the coach-client relationship. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 6(1), 25–46.
- Ianiro, P.M., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. & Kauffeld, S. (2015). Coaches and clients in action: A sequential analysis of interpersonal coach and client behaviour. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 30(3), 435–456.
- Ives, Y. & Cox, E. (2015). *Relationship coaching: The theory and practice of coaching with singles, couples, and parents*. Hove: Routledge.
- Hatcher, R.L. & Barends, A.W. (2006). How a return to theory could help alliance research. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 43(3), 292–299.
- ICF (2017). *ICF Core Competencies*. Retrieved on 5 February 2019 from <https://coachfederation.org/core-competencies>
- Jenkins, L., Passmore, J., Palmer, S. & Short, E. (2012). The nature and focus of coaching in the UK today: A UK survey report. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Practice & Research* 5(2), 132–150.
- Joo, B.K.B. (2005). Executive coaching: A conceptual framework from an integrative review of practice and research. *Human Resource Development Review*, 4(4), 462–488.
- Jones, R., Woods, S. & Guillaume, Y. (2016). The effectiveness of workplace coaching: A meta-analysis of learning and performance outcomes from coaching. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 89(2), 249–277.
- Kilburg, R.R. (1996). Toward a conceptual understanding and definition of executive coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 48(2), 134–144.
- Kilburg, R.R. (2005). Executive coaching: The road to dodoville needs paving with more than good assumptions. *Consulting Psychology Journal Practice and Research*, 57(1), 90–96. doi:10.1037/1065-9293.57.1.90
- Kimsey-House, H., Kimsey-House, K., Sandahl, P. & Whitworth, L. (2011). *Co-active coaching: Changing business, transforming lives* (3rd edn). Boston: Nicholas Brealey.
- Lai, Y.L. & McDowall, A. (2014). A systematic review (SR) of coaching psychology: focusing on the attributes of effective coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 9(2), 120–136.
- Lai, Y.L. (2014). *Enhancing evidence-based coaching through the development of a coaching psychology competency framework: Focus on the coaching relationship*. School of Psychology, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK.
- Leonard, H.S., Lewis, R., Freedman, A.M. & Passmore, J. (Eds.). (2013). *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of the psychology of leadership, change and organizational development*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Lippitt, R. (1958). *The dynamics of planned change: A comparative study of principles and techniques*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Louis, D. & Fatien Diochon, P. (2014). Educating coaches to power dynamics: Managing multiple agendas within the triangular relationship. *Journal of Psychological Issues in Organizational Culture*, 5(2), 31–47.
- Lunenburg, F.C. (2010). Managing change: The role of the change agent. *International Journal of Management, Business and Administration*, 13(1), 1–6.
- O'Neill, M.B. (2000). *Executive coaching with backbone and heart*. San Francisco: CA Jossey-Bass.
- Odendaal, A. & Le Roux, A. (2016) Contextualising coaching psychology within multicultural context. In L.E. van Zyl, M.W. Stander & A. Odendaal *Coaching psychology: Meta-theoretical perspectives and applications in multicultural context* (pp.2–25). New York: Springer International Publishing.

- Palmer, S. & Whybrow, A. (2006). The coaching psychology movement and its development within the British Psychological Society. *International Coaching Psychological Review*, 1(1), 5–11.
- Palmer, S. & Whybrow, A. (2007). *Handbook of coaching psychology: A guide for practitioners*. London: Routledge.
- Palmer, S. Stubbs, I. & Whybrow, A. (2005). Health coaching to facilitate the promotion of healthy behaviour and achievement of health-related goals. *International Journal of Health Promotion*, 14(3), 91–93.
- Parsloe, E. (1992). *Coaching, mentoring, and assessing: A practical guide to developing competence*. New York: Nichols Publishing Company.
- Passmore, J. Peterson, D. & Freire, T. (2013). The psychology of coaching and mentoring. In J. Passmore, D. Peterson & T. Freire (Eds.) *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of the psychology of coaching and mentoring* (pp.1–13). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Passmore, J., Palmer, S. & Short, E. (2010) *Results of an online UK survey of coaching and coaching psychology practitioners*. Unpublished survey.
- Passmore, J. & Fillery-Travis, A. (2011). A critical review of executive coaching research: A decade of progress and what's to come. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Practice & Research*, 4(2), 70–88.
- Passmore, J. Krauesslar, V. & Avery, R. (2015). Safety coaching: A critical literature review. of coaching in high hazard industries. *Industrial & Commercial Training*, 47(4), 195–200. doi:10.1108/ICT-12-2014-0080
- Passmore, J. & Rehman, H. (2012). Coaching as a learning methodology – a mixed methods study in driver development using a randomized controlled trial and thematic analysis. *International Coaching Psychological Review*, 7(2), 166–184.
- Passmore, J., Brown, H. & Csigas, Z. (2017). *The state of play in European coaching and mentoring*. Henley on Thames: Henley Business School & EMCC.
- Passmore, J., Stopforth, M. & Lai, Y-L. (2018). Defining coaching psychology: Debating coaching and coaching psychology definitions. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 14(2) 120–124.
- Passmore, J., Rowson, T. & Sinclair, T. (In Press). *Becoming a coach: The ICF definitive guide*. New York: Springer.
- Shoukry, H. & Cox, E. (2018). Coaching as a social process. *Management Learning*, 49(4), 413–428.
- Smither, J. (2011). Can psychotherapy research serve as a guide for research about executive coaching? An agenda for the next decade. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 26(2), 135–145.
- Sperry, L. (2008). Executive coaching: An intervention, role function, or profession? *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 60(1), 33–37.
- Theeboom, T., Beersma, B. & van Vianen, A.E.M. (2014). Does coaching work? A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual level outcomes in an organizational context. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 9(1), 1–18.
- Trueblood, T.C. (1911) Coaching a debating team. *Public Speaking Review*, 1, 84–85.
- Tschirky, H. (2011). *Managing innovation-driven companies: Approaches in practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Webb, T.L. & Sheeran, P. (2006). Does changing behavioural intentions engender behaviour change? A meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 132(2), 249–268.
- Whitworth, L., Kinsey-House, H. & Sandahl, P. (1998). *Co-active coaching: New skills for coaching people towards success in work and life*. Mountain View: Davies Black.
- Whitmore, J. (2009). Interview with Jonathan Passmore at the University of East London Coaching Conference.
- Whitmore, J. (1992). *Coaching for performance*. London: Nicholas Brealey.
- Williams, J. & Williams, J. (2011). *Marriage coaching*. Springfield: GTRC.
- Wilmott, G. & Wilmott, C (2018) *Who's in the driving seat*. Oldham: Active Driving Solutions.

Copyright of International Coaching Psychology Review is the property of British Psychological Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.