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# The state of executive coaching research: What does the current literature tell us and what's next for coaching research?

## Abstract

This paper asks the question; what do coaching psychologists bring to the developing market of executive coaching? While psychologists are trained in human behaviour, this paper argues that their real unique contribution may be their ability to undertake high quality research. The paper moves to summarise executive coaching research to date, and to suggest new areas for study, drawing from a review of counselling research history over the past five decades. Finally, the paper calls for coaching psychologists to address three key research strands, with the objectives of; evidencing the impact of coaching on performance, improving coaching practice and assisting in identifying the key components required for effective coaching training.

**Keyword:** executive coaching, coaching research, counselling research, evidenced-based coaching.

## Introduction

Over the past five years the coaching marketplace has become crowded with potential coaches all offering executives the chance to 'fulfil their potential', 'achieve excellence' or 'find the inner hero'. In a global \$2 billion per annum market (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006), what can coaching psychologists offer?

The unrestricted use of the term 'psychologist' in the UK does not help those who have trained for up to five years to achieve a clear and precise standard. In business consulting it is not uncommon to find people who claim to be 'psychologists'. In fact, they often have, at best, an undergraduate degree in psychology and sometimes little more than training in a level B psychometric instrument. The situation in coaching is worse, with limited training available, no regulation and no licensing in the UK, Australia (Spence, Cavanagh & Grant, 2006) or in the USA (Nowack, 2003).

So what can coaching psychologists bring to coaching that is unique and distinctive? Garman, Whiston and Zlatoper (2000), writing in the USA (where the term 'psychologist' is more strictly regulated) have argued that licensed psychologists do have unique skills. These skills are in understanding and working with the diversity of human behaviour. However, they note that these skills are rarely recognised by the media. In fact, with the confusion around the term 'psychologist', organisational client's or coachee's rarely understand the unique contribution psychologists can make.

Berglas (2004) has offered an alternative perspective to the debate on the contribution of psychologists in coaching. He suggests that the unique contribution is the ability to identify and

work with dysfunctional behaviour. Such behaviour he suggests is more common in the board room, as such individuals are driven to succeed, a point echoed by Furnham (2005). However having attained the most senior positions, the individuals and their organisations are vulnerable to catastrophic failure from dysfunctional behaviour, which may include inappropriate risk taking or a failure to understand and work with the more subtle human emotions of key stakeholders or partners.

An additional potential differentiator is the knowledge psychologists have or can acquire in specialist areas, using new evidence-based methodologies such as Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Passmore & Whybrow, 2007). These techniques often demand specialist or accredited training, but can be acquired by psychologists, as the knowledge builds on an existing understanding of human behaviour (Passmore, 2007).

The most powerful differentiator however, is a desire and commitment to undertake, contribute to, share and incorporate into their practice the outcomes from coaching research. Psychological training equips the coaching practitioner with the ability to undertake research within the scientific tradition of randomised control trials, as well as within the qualitative traditions using methodologies such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Grounded Theory and discursive techniques. These can add richness and depth to quantitative studies.

## **Executive coaching research**

As recently as four years ago the evidence that executive coaching could transform individual performance at work was scant. As Kampa-Kokesch (2001) reminded us during her own coaching research in 2001/02 at Western Michigan University, the number of impact studies totalled seven in 2000. Unfortunately, few of the studies provided comparable data points and in many cases failed to summarise the key points of their study such as research design, sample size, sampling procedures and a description of the methodology. The papers were reviewed in her paper, but for convenience a short summary is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summarised Executive Coaching Impact Research up to 2000**

Author	Key points
Foster and Lendl, (1996)	A review of the impact of EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) procedures on four executive coaches, which suggested that EMDR was an effective intervention for desensitising workplace experiences.
Olivero, Bane, and Kopelman, (1997)	A comparative study of training and training complemented by behavioural coaching to enhance performance in a public sector agency. The study was based on a sample of 31 participants. The results suggested that coaching increased performance by 88% while training only intervention resulted in an increase of only 22%.
Judge and Cowell (1997)	A study of managers using a variety of interventions (behavioural to psychodynamic coaching).
Gerger, (1997)	A masters level study based on a sample of 48 participants reviewing the impact of coaching on management behaviour, in particular the adoption of a coaching management style. The results suggested that between 70 -93% of executives made a change in behaviour.
Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck (1999)	A study consisted of interviews with 75 executives who had received coaching. The results of the study was a list of coaching behaviours which coachee's found help and less helpful, and a comparison with coaches perceptions of coaching behaviours. A fuller review is set out in Table 2.
Laske, (1999)	A study is also an unpublished dissertation. He interviewed a small sample of six executives. His conclusion was that executive coaching is only of value if the executive is ready for development. This implies a need for a stronger assessment stage prior to commencing coaching.
Garman, Whiston, & Zlatoper (2000)	The study involved a content analysis of coaching publications and thus failed to demonstrate based on primary empirical research clear evidence of the impact of an executive coaching intervention.

The most interesting of these studies for coaching practice, was Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck's (1999) work which, while based solely on coachee perceptions, does offer some interesting insights into understanding the perceived value of coaching in the eyes of the coachee. Aspects such as listening and questioning skills are present, alongside integrity, caring and the ability to challenge constructively.

**Table 2: What works best in coaching?**

From executives	From coaches
Honest, realistic, challenging feedback Good listening Good action points ideas Clear objectives No personal agenda Accessibility , availability Straight feedback Competence, sophistication Seeing a good model of effectiveness Coach has seen other career paths	Connecting personally, recognising where the coachee is Good listening Reflecting Caring Learning Checking back Commitment to coachee success Demonstrating integrity Openness & honesty Knowing the 'unwritten rules'. Pushing the coachee where necessary

(From Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck, 1999)

Since Kampa-Kokesch's literature research was published in 2001, the trickle of empirical studies into the impact of executive coaching has continued (Bush, 2005; Conway, 2000; Dawdy, 2004; Evers, Brouwers and Tomic, 2006; Gonzalez, 2004; Gyllensyen & Palmer 2005a; Jones and Spooner, 2006; Kampa-Kokesch, 2002; Orenstein, 2006; Passmore 2006; Smither & London, 2003; Sue-Chan & Latham, 2004; Wang, & Wentling, 2001).

This research data, both published in peer reviewed journals and unpublished studies conducted in university settings, is beginning to build a wider literature base of evidence about the impact of coaching and its potential to assist individuals in the workplace. Echoing Kampa-Kokesch's work, this paper sought to draw these recent studies together in summary form, including masters and doctoral level studies which have been conducted. As with the previous review of papers it can be difficult to draw comparisons between papers as authors frequently miss out key information about the sample size, sampling process, methodology and occasionally fail to adequately summarise their results. Following this review, the paper moves on to consider where coaching research should turn its attention to next.

**McGovern, Lindeman, Vergara, Murphy, Baker and Warrenfeltz (2001)** (commonly referred to as the Manchester Review study) sought to explore coaching return on investment (ROI). The study involved a sample of 100 executives in the USA who had received coaching during the previous four years. The participants were interviewed and asked to quantify the impact which the coaching had made on their business. Secondly, they were asked to estimate the confidence level of their estimates. Costs were collected on the cost of the coaching received and a ROI was undertaken using a simple formula;

$$\text{ROI (\%)} = \frac{\text{adjusted ROI} - \text{cost of the coaching received}}{\text{cost of the coaching received}} \times 100$$

To create the adjusted ROI figure, adjustments were made to isolate the effects of other factors and the confidence level was used to further adjust down the potential impact. Having made these adjustments the study concluded that coaching made a ROI of 545%, or that for every dollar invested in coaching, executives estimated that it contributed \$5.45 to the business.

**Wang, and Wentling, 2001** – This study was based on a group of participants from a World Bank of Asia training programme. Participants attended a three-week course and were supported with six months online coaching. In addition to supporting transfer of skills from the training programme, the researchers also found that on-line coaching improved relationship, problem solving and enhanced motivation.

**Kampa-Kokesch, 2002** – This study used the Multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) to assess the impact of coaching on leadership behaviour. The study was based on a sample of 50 coachees and 27 coaches. In reviewing the biographical data one of the suggestions made in the paper was that coaching may be an intervention associated with enhancing good behaviour rather than addressing under-performance. The results suggested that coaching did impact on leadership behaviour with increased ratings on charismatic behaviour, impact on followers and inspiration action.

**Smither and London, 2003** – This was a longitudinal study of over 400 managers found that executives who worked with a coach showed an improvement in performance in terms of direct report and supervisor ratings using a multi-rater feedback instrument.

**Sue-Chan and Latham, 2004** – This paper re-visited work by behavioural psychologist, Monroe Lefkowitz on influencing undertaken during the 1950's. The 2004 study looked at the skills of experts, colleagues and the individual to bring about personal change. It confirmed the important role of an expert whose opinion mattered. In establishing credibility one important feature was how individuals dressed. The study found that influencing was increased by 35% when the authority figure (coach) wore a tie.

**Dawdy, 2004** – This was a study conducted at Capella University, USA. It aimed to measure the effectiveness of executive coaching of coachees who had used a coach for more than 6 months in 30-60 minute coaching sessions, compared with the personality type of the coachee using a US based product; *Peoplemap* questionnaire. *Peoplemap* clusters individuals into six types; leader-free spirit, leader-task, leader-people, free spirit-task, people-task and people-free spirit. The results suggest that coaches need to adapt their coaching style to coachee preferences.

**Gonzalez, 2004** – The study reviewed coachees perceptions of what contributed towards the coaching process. The study involved a sample of 12 coachees; six male and six female who had received coaching using a collaborative coaching style. Participants were interviewed through a semi-structured interview methodology and the data was analysed using thematic analysis to reduce and cluster the data. The findings highlight that for positive progress to be made the coach needed to command respect, work collaboratively, use a discursive rather than instructional approach and act authentically. The research identified the need for a combination of action and reflection using gentle probing for transformational learning to occur.

**Bush, 2005** – This study, undertaken at Pepperdine University, used a phenomenological methodology to assess effectiveness of coaching based on coachee perceptions. The results suggested that coaches have an impact on the overall effectiveness of coaching. Key aspects of this were the experience of the coach in the eyes of the coachee, the use of a structured process and a focus on development. In addition, the research identified that coachees' and the client organisation have important roles to play through, selection of the coach, organisational culture and coachee commitment.

**Gyllensyen and Palmer, 2005b** – This control group study involving 103 participants from the UK and Scandinavia, examined the potential of coaching as an intervention to reduce workplace stress. The study using a correlation design found that workplace coaching was not a significant predictor of depression, anxiety and stress. However, participants reported high levels of coaching effectiveness. The study found lack of control and role ambiguity were significant predictors of stress.

**Passmore (Forthcoming)** – A doctoral study of executive coaches perceptions of the executive coaching process. The study used Grounded Theory to explore coachees' perceptions of the coaching relationship and the key elements which they valued. The study went on to construct a theoretical model of executive coaching which highlighted the importance of previous experiences in shaping expectations, the behaviour of the coach in balancing challenge and relationship and the selection of homework tasks which take account of the executives' organisational role and preferences.

**Evers, Brouwers and Tomic (2006)** – This study involved a pre and post test measurement of individuals and used a control group drawing on a group of 60 managers in a public service organisation; split between the control and experimental conditions. Participants in the control group benefited from a behavioural coaching intervention based on the co-coaching model (Whitworth, Kimsey-House & Sandahl; 1998). The results found significant difference between the two groups and in favour of coaching on two of six variables measured; outcome expectations with respect to acting in a balanced way and self efficacy beliefs with respect to setting ones' own goals. The authors' concluded that coaching had a positive effect, but noted that the self report nature of the study limited the conclusions which could be drawn from the results.

**Orenstein (2006)** – This study used the Empathic Organic Questionnaire (Brown, 1972) to assess the efficacy of coaching on an individual manager. The manager underwent a period of coaching and was reviewed by a group of 20 colleagues to identify change at the end of the period. The results supported the research hypothesis that the coachee was rated to have changed most in behaviours which were the subject of the coaching. Behaviours indirectly related to the objectives changed, while behaviours unrelated to coaching changed least.

**Jones and Spooner (2006)** – This study involved used semi structured interviews to explore the experiences of high achievers drawn from business and sport and their coaches. They sought to identify which factors were perceived as critical for coaching success. The researchers interviewed 21 high achievers and 7 coaches. The results echoed the earlier work above highlighting the role of trust, credibility and challenge. In addition the researchers drew out the

need for the coach to act as a sponge, to be friendly without becoming a friend, to offer rapid results and for the coach to be confident but focused exclusively on the needs of the coachee.

In addition to the impact focused studies there have been a number of other valuable contributions to coach research;

**Liljenstrand, 2004** – A study undertaken at Alliant International University, San Diego which compared the coaching practices of individuals from backgrounds in clinical psychology, occupational psychology and business. The study drew on 928 practicing coaches who undertook a survey describing their behaviours. Differences were identified between the groups at the level of frequency and length of session, use of assessment tools, perceptions of what constituted unethical practice and views on certification. The study points towards the existence of two or more markets in the USA.

**Luebbe, 2005** – This study was in two parts. The first part of the study was a qualitative study of thirteen participants who were interviewed regarding their experiences of coaching. The second part involved a survey of 66 coaches. The results indicated that trust is the highest rated attribute, confirming that the relationship is a key component in bringing about change. Secondary aspects were the coaches' skills in summarising, providing candid feedback, fostering independence and self awareness in the coachee and building a partnership with the client organisation. Also important was the role of the organisation in communicating the role and purpose of coaching to ensure coach and coachee were appropriately matched.

**Turner, 2004** – This study examined managers perceptions of coaching behaviours in supporting the transfer of learning from a leadership programme to workplace practice. The participants attended a two-week leadership programme involving strategic thinking, marketing and employee involvement. The programme was supported by coaching both during the event and post event. The researcher used a combination of qualitative and quantitative unspecified methodologies to assess the impact of the programme and coaching support. The results suggest that the process was most effective in assisting coachees to develop more effective coaching behaviours, while it was marginally less effective in supporting learning transfer.

## Life coaching research

A small number of non-work based coaching studies too have been gathering and publishing evidence of the impact of coaching. While these are not the focus of this paper, they can provide useful insights into the parallel processes between executive coaching and health and life coaching. Two examples of these are Grant's paper (2003) on life coaching and goal attainment, and his study comparing cognitive with behavioural coaching (Grant, 2001). The study, based on a population of post graduate students, revealed that participation in the life coaching programme was associated with goal attainment. In addition, coaching impacted positively on depression, anxiety and stress, while the level of self-reflection increased among participants. As Grant noted one of the key weaknesses of this, as with many other studies, was the lack of a control group. The 2001 study was based on a non-clinical population of trainee accountants and included the use of a control group. The study employed three parallel groups who were offered cognitive, behavioural and cognitive-behavioural coaching. Participants in the cognitive

only stream benefited from 'deep' and 'achieving' approaches to learning, reduced anxiety and lower levels of depression. However, academic performance declined relative to the control group. Participants in the behavioural only coaching benefited from reduced anxiety and improved academic performance. The combined stream also benefited from improved academic performance along with reduced anxiety.

## The role of coaching case studies

While these empirical studies have been under way, others (Tobias, 1996; Giglio, Diamante, & Urban 1998; Kraji, 2001; Cooper & Quick, 2003; Schnell, 2005; Winum, 2005; Blattner, 2005) have been publishing their own case studies.

Lowman (2001) has argued that case studies provide excellent evidence for building the case for coaching, and were used extensively at the start of psychology by psychodynamic thinkers. He cautions that to be useful the case studies should adhere to a set of guide principles:

1. Description of case events
2. Diagnostic interpretation by the psychologist
3. Specific intervention used
4. Results
5. Possible explanations for the results.

However, the evidence from psychological research suggests that while case studies have their place, the case for coaching needs to be built on control group studies with random selection of participants between the study group and a wait list group. Where students and others are drawn to use case studies, the following guidance might provide the reader with an improved understanding of the study.

**Table 3: Guidelines for coaching case studies**

- *Description of the context (organisational setting)*
- *Description of the coachee's issue*
- *Objectives agreed by the coach & coachee*
- *Selection of approach by the coach*
- *Description of what happened during the coaching relationship*
- *Outcomes and how were these measured/assessed*
- *Reflections on lessons learnt by the coach.*

The evidence appears to be building to support the claim that coaching does have positive impacts in a range of areas from stress management to self regard and performance. However a Passmore, J., & Gibbes, C. (2007). The state of executive coaching research: What does the current literature tell us and what's the next for coaching research? *International Coaching Psychology Review*. 2(2). 116-128

word of caution from the wider evidence on 1-1 interventions shows that the evidence is not totally conclusive. One example is the meta-study on feedback (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). The meta-research of 600 studies on feedback interventions suggests that in just over 30% of cases feedback was followed by a decrease in performance. As feedback is often seen by coaches as a key tool in developing self awareness, caution should be advised when offering it. While the evidence is not available to confirm this, gently building the evidence from feedback, monitoring the coachee's changing reactions and responding appropriately, may be features which reduce the potential negative effects. A second issue, common to all scientific research, is that while studies showing positive results are published, those that fail to find an impact go unrecorded.

As a result, it is fair to say, that the evidence for coaching having an impact on work based performance was weak, but is slowly beginning to build. Three generic criticisms can be made of many of the twenty or so studies to date. The studies have typically been based on a small sample size. In the main they have failed to use control groups. They have lacked a random allocation to groups. If coaching is to evidence, without doubt its impact, and answer the question which Filery-Travis and Lane (2006) reflected on, then more robust studies are needed.

The first conclusion from this paper is that coaching research needs to continue, and that studies using larger sample sizes, control groups and random allocation of participants should become the norm not the exception. But in which direction should coaching research travel? For the answer to this question, this paper looks to research work in counselling which has a fifty-year head start on coaching.

## **Counselling psychology research**

One obvious comparison of the coaching process is with counselling, as both involves one to one relationship, which are largely confidential, between a paid worker and customer and employ a series of techniques to help the person achieve a goal set at the start of the relationship. There are also of course some important differences, such as client group and presenting issues. What does a review of the counselling literature reveal about the research into behaviours in the counselling room?

An initial review of the counselling literature suggests that counselling research has travelled a similar pathway. As a 1-1 working relationship, counselling's hundred year history has provided evidence from thousands of studies. There is a good understanding of what work, some shared assumptions about why this works and evidence based practice which has emerged as a result of this history of research.

Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006) asked a crucial initial question of coaching; does it work? The answer from the research into counselling is 'yes', and the evidence from coaching appears to be heading towards a similar conclusion. While in counselling this is a strong conclusion to reach, meta-analysis of 475 controlled outcome studies concluded that, at the end of the treatment, the average client was 80% better off than a similar untreated client (Smith, Glass and Miller, 1980). Other meta-studies have reached similar conclusions for the impact of counselling (Lambert, Shapiro and Bergin, 1986; Howard, Kopt, Krause and Orlinsky, 1986) although with different rates of gain for treated over untreated clients. The trend is clear,

counselling as an intervention produces beneficial results as evidenced in multiple control group studies.

This conclusion for counselling was not reached without much trial and error. Early studies neglected the use of control groups, as counsellors did not wish to exclude people from treatment. Once control groups were established, this was done through waiting list groups, with participants were seen on the basis of need. The result was that study results were challenge over the lack of random allocation of participants to groups. As the number of studies increased these procedural issues were gradually overcome and the evidence of counselling as an effective intervention became compelling (Lambert and Cattani-Thompson, 1980). Coaching psychology is inching towards this outcome, at present, with a pre-dominance of poor-quality studies.

Once an answer to the question 'does it work?' was resolved in counselling, the research question was redefined. The next challenge was to understand what within counselling produced the positive impact on clients who themselves had diverse needs. The research question generated significant numbers of comparative studies (Hill and Corbett, 1993). The result of this research is that many forms of intervention appear to produce a positive effect across a wide group of needs in varying timescales. The one exception, agreed international, to this is anxiety disorders which appears to be best treated by cognitive behaviour therapy (Barlow, Craske, Cerny, and Klossko, 1989; Lambert and Bergin, 1992). In the UK, opinions are stronger regarding the potential advantages of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) over other interventions. This view is built upon the work of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2005), a government agency reviewing clinical impacts, whose research supports the claims that CBT is the most effective 1-1 interventions for mental health treatment.

Luborsky, Singer and Luborsky, (1975) have argued that all counselling interventions make a positive contribution, what ever the methodology. Further USA meta-analysis comparing different theoretical approaches concluded there was no significant difference between interventions which were intended to be therapeutic (Wampold, 1997).

One of the problems is that there were no agreed assessments for client level of need or of the outcome achieved over a defined period in counselling. This led to disputes about which intervention works best, and what is best anyway. In response several changes have been made to standardise the input (client need), process (counsellor behaviour) and outcome (client improvement). Outcome batteries were developed to measure client outcomes (Waskow and Parloff, 1975). Behaviour questionnaires have been developed to assess client need (Lambert and Hill, 1994) and manuals devised to assist counsellor's in adherence to the methodology (Lambert and Ogles, 1988). This work has helped NICE and others to attempt a more balanced comparison of interventions.

This debate is beginning to occur in coaching psychology (Kilburg, 2004). At present there is limited evidence-based research (Grant's 2003 study being the exception) to support which interventions generate the most positive outcomes for coachees, or which methodologies work best with which coachee problems. Kilburg (2004) has argued the results from coaching research will be the same as in counselling, and that 'all should have prizes'. His conclusion is

that, psychologists should focus attention on other areas of research as opposed to researching which method works best.

However, the evidence from Grant's study (2003) and the NICE research in the UK suggests that this area may be worthy of further research, and that differences maybe found between different interventions. This difference may be magnified given the diverse range of needs in the non-clinical population, that different interventions maybe more suited to both different individuals (Dawdy, 2004) and to different issues (Passmore, 2007).

In counselling there has been a steady shift towards the blending of different methods to form an integrated approach (Smith, 1982). Hill and Corbett (1993) note; "few therapists now rigidly adhere to a single theoretical model". Instead most blends cognitive, with behavioural and humanistic elements.

If we can make progress on the evidence of using different methodologies, what role does the counsellor or coach play in the process? Research in counselling suggests that the therapist has a crucial role to play. A key skill in this regard is empathy. Early research (Robinson, 1950) demonstrated that a counsellor's remarks did have an impact on the client's next statement and that contribute to the process of client change. What has been more difficult has been to capture the behaviours.

In executive coaching this research has begun and has started to identify common coach behaviours which may be most beneficial. These include; using a collaborative approach with the coachee (Gonzalez, 2004; Luebbe, 2005; Jones & Spooner, 2006), an organisation culture which is open about the reasons for coaching and offers wider support to the coachee (Luebbe 2005; Bush 2004), being authentic or congruent in the work with the coachee (Gonzalez 2004) and being seen by the coach as experienced or credible (Bush, 2005; Jones & Spooner, 2006). In the UK the work of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) (Willis, 2005), using the Adelphi technique of an expert panel has developed a set of coaching competencies which are believed to contribute to positive outcomes.

The history of counselling research also reveals similar problems to those suggested earlier for coaching (Roth and Fonagy, 2005). Firstly, counselling has seen a tendency to publish only positive outcome studies. Studies with null or with negative findings (damage to coachees) are either never submitted or are rejected during the peer review process. This is the 'file drawer' problem; with unsuccessful studies being left in the drawer. Secondly the measures of success vary widely. Thirdly the success criteria are not always full described. Finally, many studies have suffered from small population sizes which impacts on the ability to do more sensitive analysis of the data.

## **The implications for coaching psychology**

What are the implications of counselling research for executive coaching? Firstly, we need more research to understand the impact of coaching on performance. In doing such research we need to clearly define what aspect of performance we are seeking to assess, and to describe the

nature of the coaching intervention, frequency and methodology. We also need to be explicit about the results which are expected. Such studies at post graduate level can begin to build a useful bank of evidence for subsequent meta-studies.

At present much of the coaching research from the United States is post graduate in nature and largely unpublished. As we have highlighted, it has been undertaken with small sample sizes, no control groups and no random allocation of participants. Further, the studies frequently fail to define or describe the coaching intervention or methodology employed. If real progress is to be made, the research needs to be with samples of hundred plus participants in randomised control studies. We believe this may best be achieved through the involvement of professional bodies such as the BPS, American Psychological Association (APA), Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD), Association for Coaching (AC), European Mentoring and Coaching Council and the International Coaching Federation (ICF), as well as funding bodies such as European Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Foundation for Coaching to fund a series of doctoral level studies at institutions currently offering coaching and occupational psychology programmes.

The commercial sector too can make a positive contribution. The main large national and multi-national organisations using coaching could commission longitudinal research, to assess the impact of coaching on team performance over time. A typical study might involve offering coaching to members of a team over a defined period in geographical location, while the control study received structured conversations, thus removing the potential of positive gain from the Hawthorn effect. Agreed targets could be set and measured at the start, at an intermediate point and 6 or 12 months after the coaching has been concluded.

Through a series of published studies, we can over the coming three to five years build up the evidence to confirm what many coaching psychologists intuitive believe; that coaching does positively impact on workplace performance.

A second focus of study is around the different coaching methodologies. Research in the UK (Palmer and Whybrow, 2006) identified the three most popular coaching methodologies as facilitative, cognitive and behavioural coaching. What is less clear is; what do these different approaches consist of? And which approach is the most effect for the different challenges which executive coaches face? So is cognitive behavioural coaching the most effective intervention for addressing self-regard, and low self-esteem. Is behavioural coaching best at addressing behavioural skills? Is facilitative the most effective for complex problem solving?

A third area of study is on the behaviours which coaches use. This is the subject of this research. At the root of this is a desire to begin to understand what behaviours make a difference in coaching? The experiences of counselling suggest that this is a complex and difficult question. The efforts to explore this through micro skills and behavioural codings have failed to provide a definitive answer. It would seem that with the substantial overlay between different interventions in the behaviours used. It might be hypothesised that similar conclusions may be true for coaching. It might equally be hypothesised that more experienced coaches intuitively discover what works overtime and unconsciously incorporate this into their behaviour.

## The benefits of coaching research

The coaching profession is still in its infancy but psychology has a significant role to play. We have suggested that one unique role is to use coaching practice for informing our understanding through research.

Three strands of research on coaching efficacy, the efficacy of different interventions and the coaching behaviours can help in three different aspects of coaching life. The benefits for organisations are to understand more accurately whether coaching is an effective investment, and what outcomes can be anticipated.

The benefits of coaching research for coaching practitioners is to help us better understand which interventions work and when. Many coaching psychologists already have an intuitive feel for what works and when, but research provides the evidence for our practice. Coaching psychology should be about evidence-based practice.

The benefits for those in training are an improvement in the quality of training offered. To ethically train coaches, coaching psychologists need a clear and evidenced based approach. Psychologists also need, in their role as coaching trainers, an understanding of which behaviours have impact, and how interact. Many have a view about this, drawing from experience and from research in other one to one relationships, but even here the research base, such as counselling, is weak, and coaching psychology has more work to do.

## Conclusions

The psychological profession is only one group laying claim to the important area of coaching. However, psychological training and understanding of human behaviour puts the coaching psychologists in a strong position to contribute towards this new profession. This contribution can be through research-based practice for the benefits of organisations, coaching practitioners and trainees.

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