



## BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Lai, Yi-Ling and Strevens, C. (2023) Publish or perish: coping with peer-review processes through coaching. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* 21 (1), pp. 99-111. ISSN 1741-8305.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/50568/>

*Usage Guidelines:*

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact [lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk).

Academic Paper

# Publish or perish: Coping with peer-review processes through coaching

Yi-Ling Lai [✉](#) (Birkbeck College, University of London, UK)  
Caroline Strevens (University of Portsmouth, UK)

## Abstract

This study explores how a self-coaching approach assists academics to cope with prolonged peer-review processes. A coaching training workshop, using acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and strength-based coaching, was conducted with 22 academics in the U.K. To understand changes in the participants' attitude to peer-review, their self-reflective diaries and ten semi-structured interviews were analysed. This research reveals that participants tended to identify their intrinsic motivation and commitment to their research career through reflective self-dialogues and interactions with their trusted peers. This research sheds light on coaching practice by indicating constructive self-reflections help individuals to appreciate peer-review as a positive challenge instead of a threat.

## Keywords

peer review, coaching, resilience, career commitment, academic research career

## Article history

Accepted for publication: 10 January 2023  
Published online: 01 February 2023



© the Author(s)

Published by Oxford Brookes University

## Introduction

"Publish or perish" is very common advice given to new academics to highlight that the number and quality of publications play a decisive role in their career trajectory. However, research (e.g., Mark & Smith, 2012) has indicated that university staff may suffer from high levels of anxiety, depression and stress compared with the general population due to the complexity of the job, particularly the competitive scholarly publishing and funding applications that form a constant feature of their work (Holt & de Hond, 2013). Peer-review associated with journal submissions, which involves a repetitious evaluative process, was highlighted as an important factor in affecting academics' self-efficacy (i.e., beliefs of their capability) and social identity (i.e., professional reputation in scholarly circles) (Horn, 2016; Miller, Taylor, & Bedeian, 2011). The journal submission success rates usually fall well below 10% (Moizer, 2009; Trevino, 2008); the acceptance rate of top journals in some fields can be as low as around 5% (Björk, 2019). In addition, negative comments or rejections frequently cause psychological impacts on feedback recipients, such as stress and identity threat (Horn, 2016). These impacts, however, vary according

to whether the recipient perceives the feedback as challenge or threat (Horn, 2016). Horn's study (2016) revealed that scholars with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to appraise negative feedback as challenge (i.e., positive stress); in contrast, those with lower levels of self-efficacy are more likely to appraise peer-rejection as an identity threat. Identity-related threats increase anxiety and may result in negative effects on well-being and work performance, such as abandoning promising work (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Recent literature has disclosed self-efficacy and resilience are not innate but can be developed through experiences or adult learning interventions, such as coaching or mentoring (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018). Hence, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between coaching and coping with repetitious review processes and rejections. Coaching has been ascertained to strengthen individuals' resilience at the workplace; for instance, school leaders and executives in the public health sectors (Sardar & Galdames, 2018; Mosteo, Batista-Fogute, Mckeever, Serlavós, 2016). Yet, there is still a lack of empirical research evidence in adopting coaching to facilitate individuals' management of uncertainty resulting from repetitious (submission-revised) appraisal processes.

A total of 22 research active academics across several universities in the U.K. were recruited for a half-day self-coaching training workshop. This workshop, drawing upon acceptance commitment therapy (ACT) and strength-based coaching, was designed to include four approaches to support participants (1) identifying the meaning and value of their research career (i.e., intrinsic motivation), (2) alleviating emotional feelings that they experienced as a result of reviewers' feedback, (3) making personal strengths explicit and, (4) identifying necessary resources and developing realistic action plans. To establish an in-depth understanding of participants' attitudes to peer-review and feedback received from reviewers, we analysed data firstly from the reflective diaries that participants were asked to write after the coaching workshop and secondly from ten semi-structured interviews.

This paper commences with a critical analysis of the contemporary academic research environment and psychological well-being, including stress, self-efficacy and resilience of academic and research staff. In addition, existing research evidence in coaching is scrutinised to explain to what extent coaching could offer enhancement of individuals' coping behaviours in the face of constant reviews and evaluations. A comprehensive research design is explained together with findings, and these are followed with a discussion of contributions to coaching literature and practice.

## Literature review

### **Psychological well-being of research active academics**

A survey study has indicated that research active academic staff (hereafter academic staff) suffer a higher risk of psychological illness than the general population due to competitive publishing and funding application (Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, Hapuarachchi, & Boyd, 2003). Overall, academic staff work much longer (avg. 50-55 hours per week) compared to other occupational groups (Mark & Smith, 2012) owing, in part, to the pressure of producing academic outputs. Considering that the promotion systems in academia are mostly underpinned by "scholarly performance", such as publication numbers and funding generation (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997), "publish or perish" has been used to describe the tension to publish academic articles in order to succeed in a scholarly career. Specifically, academics undergo a repetitious evaluative process by their peers as they seek recognition of their academic work through publication (Horn, 2016). Given that the longest or slowest review time was reported on average to be  $31.5 \pm 23.8$  weeks in certain scientific orientated journals, early career researchers' morale, motivation, frustration and embarrassment is easily affected (Nguyen, Haddaway, Gutowsky, Wilson, Gallagher, Donaldson,

Hammerschlag, Cooke, 2015). The situation was worse during the COVID-19 outbreak that the first - round review process could be six months in comparison to three months prior to the pandemic (Flaherty, 2022). Meanwhile, with the success rates of journal submissions generally falling below 10% (Moizer, 2009), negative reviews often lead to adverse emotional consequences, including anxiety and stress. In addition, peer rejections may cause socio-psychological issues, for instance, feeling excluded from academic society and feeling unfairly treated (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), as well as low self-esteem (Bandura, 1994). Accordingly, most academics, in particular less experienced researchers, perceive continuing review and evaluations as “stressful” processes (Nguyen et al., 2015). Nevertheless, stress caused by prolonged review systems and repetitive rejections, were hardly acknowledged or discussed in the academic society. This may be because these common academic experiences have been perceived as a sign of a failure and there is stigma attached to rejection (Jaremka, Ackerman, Gawronski, Rule, Sweeny, Tropp, Metz, Molina, Ryan & Vick, 2020).

In fact, peer review has been considered as a significant social and psychological cost of an academic career due to the ways in which it potentially impacts upon psychological well-being, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience in academics (Horn, 2016).

Self-efficacy is defined as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1994, p. 71). People with lower self-efficacy tend to interpret rejections as demotivators. Specifically, they appraise peer-rejection as a threat to their professional reputation (i.e., identity threat), whereas those with higher levels of self-efficacy often appraise negative feedback as a positive challenge. Identity-related threats increase anxiety and negatively impact on well-being and work performance (Crocker & Major, 1989). However, individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to have stronger resilience which refers to positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity and challenges. A recent meta-analysis (Vanhove, Herian, Perez, Harms, & Lester, 2016) confirmed that self-efficacy and work resilience can be built or rebuilt via learning and development programmes. The results disclosed that programmes employing a one-on-one delivery format (e.g., coaching) were the most effective. Accordingly, the present study aimed to investigate in what way a self-coaching approach facilitates academics’ self-efficacy and resilience when experiencing repetitionary peer-review processes. In addition, this research seeks to identify common coping mechanisms in academics who rebound from the negative feedback more effectively.

## **Coaching and career/work resilience**

Despite various definitions of coaching, the present study considers coaching as a “learner-centred” process that engages coachees in developing their own action plans for sustainable changes and self-development. Coaching involves unlocking people’s potential to maximise their own performance and helping coachees to learn rather than to teach them, or impart any skills (Whitmore, 1996). Coaching processes should be “collaborative, systematic and solution-focused” to facilitate work performance, life experiences and personal growth. (Grant, 2001). Coaching has been described as being a Socratic-based future focused dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (coachee/client), where the facilitator uses open questions, summaries and reflections aimed at stimulating self-awareness and personal responsibility in the participant (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

The effectiveness of coaching has been ascertained by several meta-analyses (e.g., Jones, Woods & Guillaume 2016; Theeboom, Beersma & van Vianen, 2014, Wang, Lai, Xu & McDowall, 2022). Their syntheses concluded that coaching generally promoted positive results for individual-level learning and development, including the coachees’ beliefs in their capabilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources, and actions to achieve their goals (i.e., self-efficacy; Bandura & Wood, 1989, p. 408). In particular, Wang et al.’s meta-analysis (2022) identified that psychologically informed coaching approaches (e.g., cognitive behavioural and strength-based coaching) had

substantial impacts on cognitive learning outcomes, such as, meta-cognitive skills which process and organise information for the development and planning, monitoring and revision of goal-oriented behaviours (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara & Campione, 1983; Kraiger, Ford & Salas, 1993). Specifically, coaching promotes individuals' self-awareness of their strengths and capabilities to develop appropriate plans and strategies to achieve the goal they set regardless of challenges. Meanwhile, Theeboom et al.'s study (2014) ascertained that coping mechanisms (e.g., resilience and mindfulness) of individuals were strengthened after a coaching intervention. Contemporary coaching research has mainly focused on work motivation and resilience in senior leaders. For instance, intentional change theory (ICT) based coaching, which primarily emphasises the exploration and articulation of an individual's ideal self (IS) as the driver of a developmental process, has been seen to enhance personal vision, optimism, then commitment to their work in MBA students (Mosteo et al., 2016).

Building upon existing research evidence that links coaching with work resilience, the present research aimed to explore whether coaching has effects on psychological well-being of an individual academic experiencing repetitious evaluation processes. This study adopted self-coaching given that self-persuasion strategies produce more powerful and long-lasting effects than do alternative sources (Aronson, 1999). According to Aronson (1999) attitude and behaviour change induced from others is relatively short-term, especially when there is a strong emotional component (e.g., an adverse effect on one's job or career). With self-persuasion, there is no direct attempt from others to convince anyone to do anything. Considering that "research work" is usually described as a long haul by most academics, a long-term self-help and support strategy, such as self-coaching is more appropriate.

Here are the two research questions that this study intended to answer:

1. In what way the coaching approach influences self-efficacy and resilience in academics experiencing submission and resubmission during a prolonged peer-review process?
2. What are the coping mechanisms that facilitate a more constructive experience for academics facing the peer review process?

## Research process

This project used a non-probability and volunteering self-selection sampling approach. The recruitment letter (with clear inclusion / exclusion criteria) was advertised via both authors' professional social medias (e.g., LinkedIn). Potential participants could contact the authors for the initial screen to confirm their eligibility for the study. Participants had to submit at least an academic journal paper and is or has experienced a blind peer-review process in the past 12 months. A total of 22 research active academic staff in varied disciplines (13 women and 9 men) across universities in the U.K. took part in this study. Participants' experiences in peer-review processes were mixed, the range of their academic tenure was between two and ten years. This study was split into three stages, the following section explains the details of each stage.

### Stage 1: Pre-intervention evaluation

Prior to the self-coaching workshop, participants were asked to complete two questionnaires, each using a five-point Likert scale to establish a measurement for their baseline self-efficacy and career resilience. The purpose was to help the participants to gain a baseline of their overall self-confidence and commitment to their job before the coaching workshop. The statistical analysis was not carried out due to a small sample size.

The self-efficacy scale (SES) evaluates an individual's beliefs in their own personal capabilities that mobilise motivation, and behaviour needed to meet given situational demands (Wood & Bandura,

1989). It is considered to be a reliable and rigorous scale and has been used extensively in organisational research (Saks, 1995). The original SES with eight questions (Wood & Bandura, 1989) was adapted into academic paper submission scenarios in this study to establish a greater picture of participants' perceived confidence in undertaking the peer-review and evaluation process. For instance, participants were asked to rate their confidence level on their goals (e.g., I believe I will be able to achieve the submission/resubmission goal that I have set for myself). In addition, this scale aimed to understand the persistence of individuals in the face of challenges, like "When facing difficult comments and feedback from reviewers, I am confident that I will accomplish them".

The career resilience scale (CRS) by Carson and Bedeian in 1995 consists of 24 questions used to measure individuals' ability to adapt to change, even when the circumstances are discouraging or disruptive (London, 1997). The CRS in this study was accommodated to academic research career settings. Example questions include "I do not feel emotionally attached to my research career goal" and "I have created a plan for my development to achieve my research goal".

Participants were encouraged to carry on using these two questionnaires to keep track of their self-efficacy level and commitment to their academic career after the study. The research team did not gather further questionnaire data given the restricted research scope and resource.

## **Stage 2: The Self-coaching training workshop**

Next, a half day (between four and five hours) face-to-face self-coaching training workshop was carried out. The design of this self-coaching workshop was informed by acceptance & commitment therapy (hereafter ACT). This theory is an empirically based third-generation cognitive behavioural change approach which has been frequently used in coaching research. The ACT model specifies a set of key treatment components including values (clarifying personally meaningful purpose of actions), emotional defusion (separating emotional feelings from thoughts), acceptance (willingness to experience aversive emotions without avoidance) and present moment awareness (flexible attention to current experiences) (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2011). In addition, strength-based coaching, which emphasises building on strengths, confidence and positive emotion during the change process (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007) was combined with ACT in this workshop. The effectiveness of this sort of forward-looking psychological intervention has been scientifically examined and found to enhance individuals' psychological well-being (Bolier, Haverman, Westerhof, Riper & Bohlmeijer, 2013).

In the workshop, participants were invited to select essential values and motivations of their research career (maximum five values) from the Personal Value Cards (Miller, C'de Baca, Matthews, & Wilbourne, 2001). This activity was designed based on the first element of ACT model and enabled participants to understand and make explicit their work-related motivations, such as "making a lasting contribution in the world" or "carrying out the duties and obligations". Next, participants were asked to write down their feelings towards recent feedback from reviewers based on the third-person perspective. This self-reflective writing exercise matched with two elements of the ACT model, acceptance and emotional defusion to facilitate participants in withdrawing their personal emotions (especially negative sensations) from this "peer review related event". For instance: it was normal to feel frustrated by the review one's comment as "she" has had been getting up at 4 AM and made so many efforts on this paper. Subsequently, participants were guided to practice fundamental mindfulness meditation and breathing exercises which helped them to clear up their thoughts and doubts regarding the peer-review processes. The purpose of this exercise was to draw out participants' present moment awareness and develop new action plans.

Furthermore, the theory of positive psychology was applied. The first author facilitated participants to identify their strengths on the basis of their chosen research career values. For instance, in the workshop, when participants chose "challenge" as the reason they enjoy doing research, they at

the same time identified "goal-oriented", "self-driven" and "fearless" as their personal strengths. Finally, participants developed a comprehensive and realistic writing plan in accordance with their identified strengths. One example was "to submit at least five times / papers in the next 12 months as a challenging goal". Then, this participant made a more detailed plan and distinguished resources they need to achieve this "submission goal". Participants were encouraged to share their experiences and stories between exercises.

Given that the main purpose of this workshop was to establish participants' fundamental self-coaching skills, they were encouraged to run through these exercises once every two or three months and to write down reflective diary.

### **Stage 3: Reflective diary and post-workshop interviews**

To establish a greater picture of the impact of the coaching training workshop, participants were asked to keep a self-reflective diary. All participants were invited to take part in a one-on-one interview one month after their workshop and diary writing. Ten participants agreed to be interviewed having given informed consent. This study had been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the research ethics committee in the second author's institution.

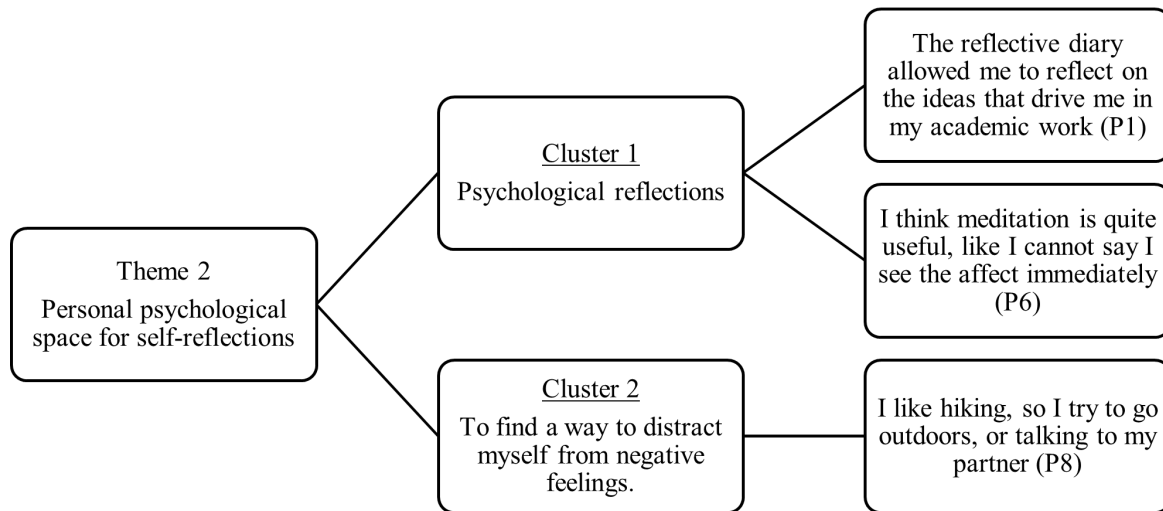
### **Data Analysis**

The thematic analysis of participants' reflective diary and interview transcriptions. All the interviews and diary were transcribed verbatim. The data analysis contained three stages (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). Initially, the first author and research project assistant conducted an open coding with all transcriptions through a random order separately (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Statements relevant to research objectives, such as participants' feedback on the coaching workshop, reflections on their own self-coaching, effective elements and behaviours that facilitate a more constructive experience in peer-review process and so forth, were marked and displayed in an Excel sheet for the second-stage coding. The second-stage coding focused on clustering the similar statements from the previous stage and associating these clustered initial codes with relevant theories. The third stage intended to demonstrate the rigour of the qualitative research through a cross validation and review between two data analysts. Some codes were found to overlap conceptually and so were merged; other codes identified as being not highly relevant were eliminated. In total, 284 open codes were identified and clustered into 7 initial themes. The cross validation of coding outlined four main themes. One coding example is presented in Figure 1.

## **Findings**

Overall, this study initially answers the first research question by indicating that constructive self-reflections established through this ACT and strength-based coaching model has positive impacts on participants self-belief in their capabilities to overcome difficulties during the peer-review process (i.e., self-efficacy). These exercises facilitated participants to identify their intrinsic motivations and personal strengths to help them rebound from the negative feedback more effectively (i.e., commitment and resilience). Furthermore, this coaching workshop and post-workshop self-coaching helped participants to develop several self-reflection skills via constructive dialogues, reflective diary, mindfulness meditation and comprehensive action plans, to cope with peer-review processes more effectively. This study generated four main themes which are presented and explained in the following section.

Figure 1: A coding example



## Identifying intrinsic motivation through the value cards sorting

First, the personal value card sorting activity helped participants to identify their intrinsic motivations for their research career. Intrinsic motivations usually develop individuals' long-term commitment without external forces. Although several value cards associated with extrinsic motivation, i.e., an external force or a desired outcome, like power, wealth and fame, were listed by participants in this exercise, most participants selected value cards recognised as intrinsic motivation i.e., personal interest or enjoyment such as knowledge, achievement and challenge as important meanings of their research work (See Table 1).

Table 1: Results of value cards sorting

Ranking	Value	Definitions	Total (times)	Male	Female
1	Knowledge	To learn and contribute valuable knowledge	14	5 /9	9/13
2	Achievement	To have important accomplishments	10	3/9	6/13
3	Creativity	To have new and original ideas	9	4/9	5/13
4	Challenge	To take on difficult tasks and problems	8	3/9	5/13
5	Contribution	To make a lasting contribution in the world	7	5/9	2/13
6	Openness	To be open to new experiences, ideas, and options	5	1/9	4/13
7	Self-esteem	To feel good about myself	4	1/9	3/13
8	Justice	To promote fair and equal treatment for all	4	2/9	2/13
9	Growth	To keep changing and growing	4	2/9	2/13
10	Purpose	To have meaning and direction in my life	4	1/9	3/13

The top three chosen values are “knowledge”, “achievement” and “creativity”. This finding implies that most participants considered making new and original knowledge contributions to their research areas to fulfil their sense of accomplishments. Specifically, participants were mainly driven by internal rewards (i.e., psychological needs) when undertaking their research and submitting papers. The majority of participants indicated this value cards sorting exercise offered them an opportunity to reframe the meaning of their work and discover/rediscover personal strengths to support their values.



*“It was essentially finding my values, and kind of matching them with my behaviours, or align with my daily habits.” (P4: 3 years, Marketing- diary)*

Meanwhile, participants developed better awareness of their relationship and commitment to their professional society through this value card sorting process. This also enhanced participants' intrinsic motivation and career resilience whereas they have stronger connections to their peers.

*“Because part of an academic's role is actually to create new knowledge for students and my research community. So I see the value if creating knowledge and acquiring knowledge as an intrinsic.” (P7: 7 years, Economics and Finance, diary)*

## Personal psychological space for self-reflections

Participants suggested a personal psychological space (including reflective exercises in workshop and the post-workshop diary) is crucial to enable participants to evaluate their own cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes as well as to conceptualise of their learning. Following the coaching training workshop, participants realised the importance of regular constructive self-dialogues in order to help them in re-evaluating the meaning of their research and to allow them to re-define their attitude to the peer-review process. Participants with stronger intrinsic motivation tend to see the peer-review process as a challenge instead of threat (Horn, 2016). Meanwhile, the elementary mindfulness meditation and breathing exercises facilitated their cognitive reasoning and alleviated negative feelings from reviewers' feedback or decisions. Several participants indicated that a stable emotional state makes a significant positive influence on their ability to cope with unfavourable feedback from reviewers.

*“I think meditation is quite useful, like I cannot say I see the affect immediately, like I write my paper, I sit and start writing my paper, but it was good for me to come rather than keeping this down feeling with me for a long time, with meditation it was kind of helpful to accept it in a way, so that was useful.” (P6: 4 years, Law School, interview)*

*“The reflective diary allowed me to reflect on the ideas that drive me in my academic work, or the challenges that I've been facing, and maybe the feelings that I've been experiencing during the peer review process helped.” (P1: 2 years, Marketing, interview)*

Furthermore, some participants pointed out the importance of expectation management, which is also considered part of emotional management. When they had a more realistic submission plan, it was easier to experience a sense of achievement, and this provided the motivation to face a tougher task in the future. This can be aligned with 'emotional diffusion' and “present moment awareness” elements in the ACT model given that explicit goals and plans create positive attitudes and help individuals to focus on a forward-looking psychological space (Locke & Latham, 1990).

*“In the past I think sometimes I've tried safer paths, and now I think my strategies for the most important pieces of work I'll try to submit them into the best places.” (P8: 2 years, Engineering, diary)*

*“There will be always a home for your paper, it's just you haven't found it yet, so when you get a rejection it doesn't mean your paper's not good enough, sometimes it is but sometimes it just has other factors, it's not it probably won't fit in a journal.” (P10: 5 years, Psychology, interview)*

Last, but not the least, “self-rewarding” is crucial for the enhancement of participants' positive attitude and work motivation. For instance, several participants mentioned doing exercise or activities they enjoy, and this helped them to scale down their anxiety and appreciate the joyful psychological space they create before taking a further challenge.

*“Going to gym quite a lot, like the classes, yoga, Zumba, yoga, big burn.” (P2: 10 years, Architecture, interview)*

*“I like hiking, so I try to go outdoors, or talking to my partner, have sugar, watch news, and having interesting thoughts.” (P8: 2 years, Engineering, diary)*

## Social space to seek support and sense of belonging

Most participants emphasised the value of this group coaching workshop is to help them to understand that they were not alone. They also appreciated this opportunity to share feelings with peers prior to their self-coaching practice. Furthermore, participants highlighted that the workshop exercises facilitated them learning from each other’s techniques and strategies. Some participants formed a small peer-support group after the workshop, for instance, a “critical friend club” to give or receive constructive feedback from each other before the submission.

*“There is a need for meeting more with the other academics and sharing this, because I think in academic world it’s a bit like..., we generally don’t talk about, at least in my environment.” (P4: 3 years, Marketing, diary)*

*“Like an internal peer review first, so I can send my work to my colleagues and ask them to give me feedback before we’re sending out.” (P10: 5 years, Psychology, interview)*

Meanwhile, participants mentioned that a mentoring system or coaching by external practitioners could be a helpful approach to support them in coping with the peer review process.

*“I would feel better doing a one-to-one session with an allocated mentor or coach because I can really focus on what I’m feeling on a regular basis.” (P9: 3 years, Computer Science, interview).*

## Organisational culture and managerial support

Third, some participants disclosed that the overall organisational culture, resources and support played a decisive role in coping with the peer-review processes. For instance, they suggested that their institution should pay more attention to academic psychological well-being and understand the reasons that cause staff’s anxiety and stress.

*“I think the university need to understand the pressures that academics are under, and I wouldn’t like it to be this kind of thing that was bolted on to the existing system, I think it needs to be fully integrated into the system, especially if the university is pushing.” (P1: 2 years, Marketing, interview)*

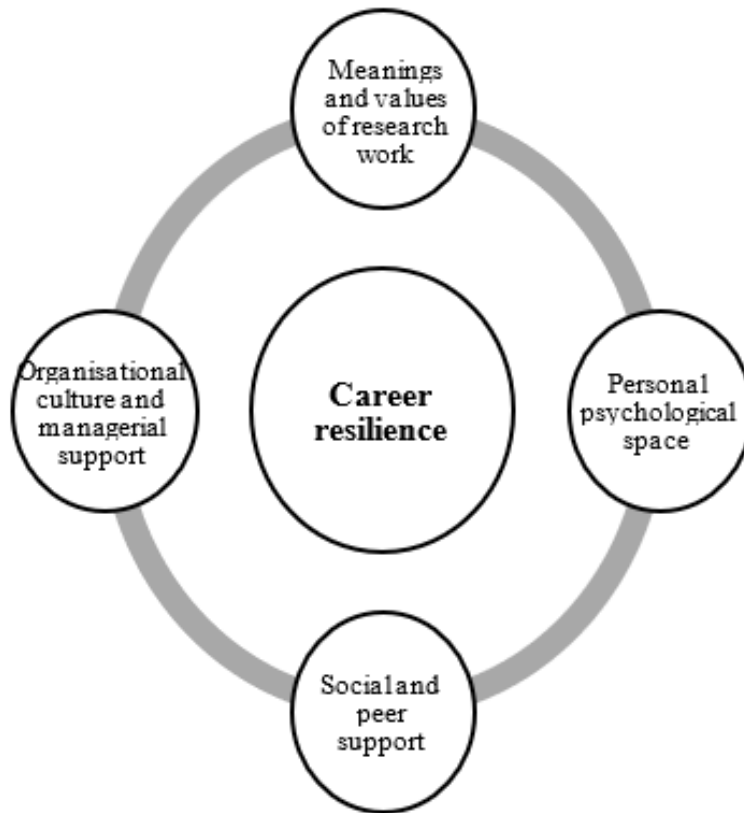
Moreover, it was suggested that the current performance development plan (PDP) meetings should embed the discussion of resources academics can have access to in order to tackle challenges they encounter during the prolonged peer-review process.

*“Especially my line manager, I think she’s really supportive, and I don’t feel really bad if I did something wrong.” (P9: 3 years, Computer Science, diary)*

*“It would be nice if my manager proactively asking my feeling and what kind of support I need to cope with frustrations I got from peer-review process.” (P8: 2 years, Engineering, interview)*

A conceptual framework is outlined to present essential coping mechanisms that promote academics’ self-efficacy and resilience during the peer-review process through coaching (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: The Conceptual Framework of self-coaching on research career resilience**



## Discussion

This section begins with discussions of two research questions: (1) In what way the coaching approach influences self-efficacy and resilience in academics experiencing submission and resubmission during a prolonged peer-review process? (2) What are the coping mechanisms that facilitates a more constructive experience for academics facing the peer review process? This is followed with the theoretical contributions and practical implications of this study.

First, this preliminary study confirms that exercises embedded in our coaching training workshop (e.g., career values identification) created a space to discover participants' intrinsic motivations and strengths. The post-session self-coaching practice also stimulate their potential by reflecting on their behaviours and revising action plans in the diary writing. Hence, this study indicates that coaching had meaningful influences on self-efficacy and resilience of academics during the repetitious peer-review process.

Most participants revealed that the self-coaching techniques they learnt from the workshop assisted them in reframing their attitude to the peer-review process. For instance, the participants disclosed that identifying the meaning and value of their research work through card sorting clarified their intrinsic motivation. This determination of intrinsic motivation helped participants to distinguish their personal strengths to cope with difficulties and uncertainty. In addition, self-reflective writing and mindfulness meditation offered them a psychological space to clear away adverse emotional reactions. Participants pointed out a balanced emotional state helped to adjust their mindset towards the peer-review process and established greater self-belief. Accordingly, the research findings conclude that coaching had a certain degree of influence on academics' self-awareness and belief and promoted their coping with repetitious peer-evaluations and feedback.

The second objective of this study was to identify crucial behaviours that facilitate a more constructive experience for academics facing the peer review process. After a cross analysis of participants' post-workshop self-reflective diary and interview transcriptions, four coping mechanisms are outlined:

1. Keeping in mind a good understanding of intrinsic motivations by reviewing the meaning and value of their research work on a regular basis.
2. Carrying out constructive and continuous self-reflections through writing a form of private diary.
3. Maintaining a balanced emotion toward reviewers' feedback and decisions via mindfulness meditations or other enjoyable activities.
4. Developing realistic submission plans and seeking necessary resources and support.

In a brief summary, this study initially clarifies that coaching had certain positive effects on the self-awareness, belief and coping mechanisms of academics when experiencing drawn-out and constant evaluations of paper submission/resubmission. Meanwhile, several useful behaviours and valuable factors were elicited. For instance, retaining a forward-looking mindset, carrying out constructive self-reflections on their emotions, behaviours and plans and proactively seeking resources and support.

This study sheds light on coaching literature by extending coaching from a performance-oriented intervention to a support that facilitates individuals' coping with uncertainty caused by repetitious peer evaluations. According to existing meta-analyses of coaching, most coaching primary studies focused on explicit work-related outcomes, such as leadership development, performance management, job satisfaction and general self-efficacy. This is an instance of a pioneering project aimed at investigating psychological effects resulting from repetitious uncertain situations. Given that uncertainty generates a feeling of vulnerability or anxiety (Clampitt, Williams & Korenak, 2000), a coaching approach may offer academics a medium to establish a forward-looking mindset and long-term strategy during the course of constant reviews through constructive dialogues and reflections (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; Whitmore, 1996). Hence, the present study makes an introductory step by applying coaching to help individuals who are under repetitious uncertainty and anxiety. This study also advances extant coaching practice through presenting a comprehensive training workshop for academics designed to enhance coping when experiencing repetitious and uncertain peer-review processes. The authors took an initial step to integrate ACT and strength-based coaching to assist individuals who suffer from constant stress and anxiety. This workshop could be considered as a preliminary prototype for similar applications in the future.

## Conclusion

The competition between higher educational institutions (HEIs) has led to higher demand for research outputs, such as publications and grants (Castro-Ceacero & Ion, 2019). Peer review has been considered as a significant social and psychological cost of an academic's career due to the ways in which it potentially impacts upon psychological well-being, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience (Horn, 2016). Hence, coaching, a reflective process to facilitate individuals experiencing positive behavioural changes through constructive dialogues and reasoning, can offer research active academics a psychological space to review their intrinsic motivation, maintain a positive mindset and identify strengths to cope with repetitious peer-review processes. This study took a pioneering step by integrating ACT and strength-based coaching to investigate whether coaching makes a positive influence on career resilience in academics. There are several limitations of this study. For instance, it was challenging to conduct a longitudinal study due to limited resources and time. Furthermore, the small sample size has limited the scope of the quantitative data analysis. Therefore, an extensive study to conduct a series of coaching workshops and collect follow-up measurable evaluation outcomes is needed. This research can be transferred to other employment where there is a high rate of rejection such as acting and

journalism and the outcomes can be disseminated to target impact outside the University environment. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that this study is a “kick-off” of applying coaching to improve individuals’ psychological well-being under repetitionary stress. Further examinations of this preliminary model are necessary to draw out distinct research evidence in relevant settings.

## References

- Aronson, E. (1999). The power of self-persuasion. *American Psychologist*, 54(11), 875-884. DOI: 10.1037/h0088188.
- Bandura, A., & Wessels, S. (1994). *Self-efficacy* (Vol. 4, pp. 71-81). na.
- Bandura, A., & Wood, R. (1989). Effect of perceived controllability and performance standards on self-regulation of complex decision making. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 56(5), 805-814. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.56.5.805.
- Biswas-Diener, R., & Dean, B. (2007). *Positive psychology coaching: Putting the science of happiness to work for your clients*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Björk, B. C. (2019). Acceptance rates of scholarly peer-reviewed journals: A literature survey. *El profesional de la información*, 28(4), 1-9. DOI: 10.3145/epi.2019.jul.07.
- Bolier, L., Haverman, M., Westerhof, G. J., Riper, H., Smit, F., & Bohlmeijer, E. (2013). Positive psychology interventions: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies. *BMC public health*, 13(1), 1-20. DOI: 10.1186/1471-2458-13-119.
- Brown, A.L., Bransford, J.D., Ferrara, R.A. and Campione, J. (1983), Learning, understanding, and remembering. In, P.H. Mussen, J.H. Flavell & E.M. Markman (Eds.). *Handbook of Child Psychology*. New York, John Wiley and Sons.
- Castro-Ceacero, D., & Ion, G. (2019). Changes in the university research approach: Challenges for academics’ scientific productivity. *Higher Education Policy*, 32(4), 681-699. DOI: 10.1057/s41307-018-0101-0.
- Carson, K. D., Carson, P. P., & Bedeian, A. G. (1995). Development and construct validation of a career entrenchment measure. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 68(4), 301-320. DOI: 10.1111/j.2044-8325.1995.tb00589.x.
- Clampitt, P. G., Williams, M. L., & Korenak, A. (2000). Managing organizational uncertainty: Conceptualization and measurement. *International Communication Association, Acapulco*.
- Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological review*, 96(4), 608-630. DOI: 10.1037/0033-295X.96.4.608.
- Flaherty, C. (2022). The Peer-Review Crisis. *Inside Higher Education*. Available at: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/06/13/peer-review-crisis-creates-problems-journals-and-scholars>.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational research methods*, 16(1), 15-31. DOI: 10.1177/1094428112452151.
- Grant, A. M. (2001). *Towards a psychology of coaching*. Unpublished manuscript, Sydney.
- Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2011). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change*. Guilford press.
- Holt, R., & den Hond, F. (2013). Sapere aude. *Organization Studies*, 34(11), 1587-1600. DOI: 10.1177/0170840613502293.
- Horn, S. A. (2016). The social and psychological costs of peer review: Stress and coping with manuscript rejection. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 25(1), 11-26. DOI: 10.1177/1056492615586597.
- Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428–444). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Jaremka, L. M., Ackerman, J. M., Gawronski, B., Rule, N. O., Sweeny, K., Tropp, L. R., ... & Vick, S. B. (2020). Common academic experiences no one talks about: Repeated rejection, impostor syndrome, and burnout. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15(3), 519-543. DOI: 10.1177/1745691619898848.
- Jones, R. J., Woods, S. A., & Guillaume, Y. R. (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. DOI: 10.1111/joop.12119.
- Kraiger, K., Ford, J. K., & Salas, E. (1993). Application of cognitive, skill-based, and affective theories of learning outcomes to new methods of training evaluation. *Journal of applied psychology*, 78(2), 311-328. DOI: 10.1037/0021-9010.78.2.311.
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1990). *A theory of goal setting & task performance*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- London, M. (1997). Overcoming Career Barriers: A Model of Cognitive and Emotional Processes for Realistic Appraisal and Constructive Coping. *Journal of Career Development*, 24(1), 25-39.

- Mark, G., & Smith, A. P. (2012). Effects of occupational stress, job characteristics, coping, and attributional style on the mental health and job satisfaction of university employees. *Anxiety, Stress & Coping*, 25(1), 63-78. DOI: [10.1080/10615806.2010.548088](https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2010.548088).
- Miller, W. R., C'de Baca, J., Matthews, D. B., & Wilbourne, P. L. (2001). *Personal values card sort*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico.
- Miller, A. N., Taylor, S. G., & Bedeian, A. G. (2011). Publish or perish: Academic life as management faculty live it. *Career development international*, 16(5), 422-445. DOI: [10.1108/13620431111167751](https://doi.org/10.1108/13620431111167751).
- Moizer, P. (2009). Publishing in accounting journals: A fair game?. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 34(2), 285-304. DOI: [10.1016/j.aos.2008.08.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2008.08.003).
- Mosteo, L. P., Batista-Foguet, J. M., McKeever, J. D., & Serlavós, R. (2016). Understanding cognitive-emotional processing through a coaching process: The influence of coaching on vision, goal-directed energy, and resilience. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 52(1), 64-96. DOI: [10.1177/0021886315600070](https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886315600070).
- Nguyen, V. M., Haddaway, N. R., Gutowsky, L. F., Wilson, A. D., Gallagher, A. J., Donaldson, M. R., ... & Cooke, S. J. (2015). How long is too long in contemporary peer review? Perspectives from authors publishing in conservation biology journals. *PLoS one*, 10(8), e0132557. DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0132557](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0132557).
- 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, Research and Practice*, 4(2), 70-88. DOI: [10.1080/17521882.2011.596484](https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2011.596484).
- Peiperl, M., & Baruch, Y. (1997). Back to square zero: The post-corporate career. *Organizational dynamics*, 25(4), 7-22. DOI: [10.1016/S0090-2616\(97\)90033-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0090-2616(97)90033-4).
- Saks, A. M. (1995). Longitudinal field investigation of the moderating and mediating effects of self-efficacy on the relationship between training and newcomer adjustment. *Journal of applied psychology*, 80(2), 211-225. DOI: [10.1037/0021-9010.80.2.211](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.80.2.211).
- Sardar, H., & Galdames, S. (2018). School leaders' resilience: does coaching help in supporting headteachers and deputies?. *Coaching: An international journal of theory, research and practice*, 11(1), 46-59. DOI: [10.1080/17521882.2017.1292536](https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2017.1292536).
- Tabibnia, G., & Radecki, D. (2018). Resilience training that can change the brain. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 70(1), 59-88. DOI: [10.1037/cpb0000110](https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000110).
- Theeboom, T., Beersma, B., & van Vianen, A. E. (2014). Does coaching work? A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual level outcomes in an organizational context. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 9(1), 1-18. DOI: [10.1080/17439760.2013.837499](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2013.837499).
- Thibaut, J. W., & Walker, L. (1975). *Procedural justice: A psychological analysis*. L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Treviño, L. K. (Ed.). (2008). Editor's comments: Why review? Because reviewing is a professional responsibility. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(1), 8-10. DOI: [10.5465/amr.2008.27744831](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2008.27744831).
- Vanhove, A. J., Herian, M. N., Perez, A. L., Harms, P. D., & Lester, P. B. (2016). Can resilience be developed at work? A meta-analytic review of resilience-building programme effectiveness. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 89(2), 278-307. DOI: [10.1111/joop.12123](https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12123).
- Wang, Q., Y. L., Xu, X., & McDowall, A. (2022). The effectiveness of workplace coaching: a meta-analysis of contemporary psychologically informed coaching approaches. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 14(1), 77-101. DOI: [10.1108/JWAM-04-2021-0030](https://doi.org/10.1108/JWAM-04-2021-0030).
- Whitmore, J. (1996). *Coaching for performance*. N. Brealey Pub.
- Winefield, A. H., Gillespie, N., Stough, C., Dua, J., Hapuarachchi, J., & Boyd, C. (2003). Occupational stress in Australian university staff: Results from a national survey. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 10(1), 51-63. DOI: [10.1037/1072-5245.10.1.51](https://doi.org/10.1037/1072-5245.10.1.51).
- Wood, R., & Bandura, A. (1989). Social cognitive theory of organizational management. *Academy of management Review*, 14(3), 361-384. DOI: [10.2307/258173](https://doi.org/10.2307/258173).

## About the authors

**Yi-Ling Lai** has ten years' research experience in coaching psychology. She takes active roles in the British Psychological Society, and is the Editor of *International Coaching Psychology Review*.

**Caroline Strevens** is a Professor of Legal Education, University of Portsmouth. Her primary research area is legal education including investigating how principles of positive psychology may influence the well-being of staff and students in Higher Education.