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A closer observation of current coaching psychology research

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The SGCP research group seeks to help the advancement of evidence-based practice within coaching. Although the number of systematic reviews (including meta-analyses) on coaching have been springing up like mushrooms subsequent to Briner's (2012) critical questions about evidence-based practice, coaching psychological approaches (e.g. cognitive behavioural coaching) do not receive detailed attention within these reviews. As an advocate of evidence-based practice, I decided to carry out a small investigation into existing coaching psychology literature (between 1995 and 2017) to have a better picture of the scientific evidence we have up-to-date. To focus on the psychological perspectives on coaching, the investigation was limited to primary research with specific psychological coaching framework(s) in an organisational setting. After a long process to screen all relevant papers, a total of 31 ($N=31$) studies were identified to meet the criteria. Several questions arose whilst evaluating these studies.

First, many of the coaching research studies were not set within organisations, instead using university or MBA students as participants (e.g. Franklin & Franklin, 2012; Grant, 2014). In addition, some coaching studies were conducted in the context of driving lessons (e.g. Passmore & Rehman, 2012). If we exclude these non-organisationally-set studies, there is actually limited evidence to determine the effectiveness of psychological coaching intervention in a workplace setting.

Second, do we have sufficient scientific evidence for the psychological coaching frameworks we are promoting? According to the initial search results, the majority of studies either applied mixed coaching frameworks ($N=6$), such as cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC)

with GROW model, or some individual invented approaches ($N=13$), such as the ‘emotional dimensions’ framework. In fact, there is limited evidence in existing literature to confirm that the frameworks introduced in several significant coaching handbooks (e.g. solution-focused coaching or CBC) generate positive outcomes in organisations. For instance, CBC is applied in merely five quantitative trials between 2009 and 2015. In addition, solution focused coaching is never solely examined in any of these included studies, but instead always combined with other coaching approaches.

This short discussion paper does not intend to undervalue the efforts we have made so far on the development of evidence based coaching practice; in contrast, this is more of a ‘wake-up call’ for all of us to bridge the gap and strengthen the connection with organisations for producing high quality coaching research evidence. The responsibility for the development of evidence-based coaching should not only rely on scholars, but instead be an integration between practitioners, coaching recipients and stakeholders.