COACHING RESEARCHED

A Coaching Psychology Reader for Practitioners and Researchers

EDITED BY

JONATHAN PASSMORE and DAVID TEE

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John of Salisbury, Metalogicon, 1159
This book is dedicated to Prof Anthony M Grant, whose work inspired many and set the foundations for an evidenced-based approach to coaching through the development of coaching psychology.
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We live in a world of change and transition. We cannot always control our environment or indeed what happens in our lives, but we can choose how we respond to it. We need to adapt to new ways of working and enhance how we interact with our world and those around us. At times, it can be challenging to see the way ahead or to explore different options. This is true for world and business leaders as it is for the rest of us in our daily lives. As Galileo said, ‘we cannot teach people anything; we can only help them to discover it within themselves’. Coaching has increased in popularity over the last 30 years and is now applied in a wide range of contexts – from boardrooms to students, to educational and medical contexts. There is a fine line between coaching, mentoring and indeed counselling; and, as with coaches, practitioners too operate from different models and different perspectives.

We want to create momentum for change – for each person, their teams and the environments in which they live and work. I readily observe this in practice. Take Jenna, the high-flying executive, delivering and exceeding expectations. How can coaching support her? By using evidence-based practice, we can appreciate her experience more clearly. We can enable her to see different opportunities as well as ways to make the most of her social and emotional capital and to leverage resources more effectively. This is simply one example but now multiple the use of research and practice across the thousands of coaching situations and there is power and impact from coaching psychology.

But are we making the most of the research and evidence in the way we apply coaching? What does research tell us about the impact of our interventions, and what data and evidence do we need for future work? This book provides us with insights into these areas and more. As the president of the British Psychological Society, I am delighted that this BPS-sponsored book is being published. My interest in this book is twofold. First, my experience over the last two decades as a practitioner psychologist and executive coach highlights the need for scientific evidence and well-researched frameworks. Second, as a sponsor of the application of science and evidence-based practice in coaching, I want to see the perforation of research evidence and psychological base in coaching interventions.

The BPS Special Group in Coaching Psychology (SGCP) was formed in 2004 in response to the Coaching Psychology Forum (CPF) and the desire to share research as well as practical experiences. As the group evolved, the core focus has been on the scientific study and application of behaviour, cognition and emotion to deepen our understanding of individuals’ and groups’ performance, achievement and well-being, and to enhance practice within coaching. What has this meant in terms of research and practice?
This book, titled *Coaching Researched: A Coaching Psychology Reader*, is a milestone in our understanding of the psychological research in coaching psychology. Our esteemed colleagues, Jonathan Passmore and David Tee, as editors have brought together a strong mix of researchers and research outcomes to explore the core themes for coaching research as we move into the next phase of coaching development.

In the 20 chapters, they address the core research themes and the evidence behind it, from a qualitative, quantitative and mixed research perspective. They discuss the value of coaching as a behavioural change tool, enabling us to appreciate the core threads and themes for development and coaching, and the value of different frameworks and approaches. They enable us to understand why the investment in coaching psychology adds significant value to clients, practitioners and organisations.

This book enables us to appreciate the value of rigorous research methods and insights. It encourages us to reflect on the coaching practice story and highlights the importance of research for practice, insightful coaching psychology theory and the value of the evidence base. It enables us to think seriously about how we can combine theory and practice. It emphasises the importance of coaching supervision and continuous professional development, and why coaching is an important part of psychology.

Most of all, it is a book that brings in the human perspective and challenges us all to think more broadly about coaching research and practice. Like me, I am sure that you will find this to be a thought-provoking and genuinely interesting insight into coaching psychology. Enjoy!

– Dr Hazel McLaughlin: President, British Psychological Society and Founder, MorphSmart Ltd
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About the Editors

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Coaching psychology has emerged from the wider tradition of coaching and has frequently struggled to provide a clear identity for itself as something distinct or separate from coaching. In the same way, coaching supervision has struggled to shake off its roots as a therapeutic process used by therapists to provide a space for reflection and guidance about their highly emotionally charged work.

In this first section of the book, we offer two papers from the *International Coaching Psychology Review*. The first explores the nature of coaching and coaching psychology, offering the reader multiple definitions to consider. Maybe one of coaching psychology and coaching’s strengths is the diversity of its application and thus multiplicity of its definitions. One key aspect for psychologists is the central nature of evidence. If coaching psychology is anything it is evidenced-based practice, which explores the behavior, cognition, and emotion of coaching.

The 2010–2020 period has seen a growth in coaching research, promoted not only by coaching journals such as the *International Coaching Psychology Review* and *The Coaching Psychologist*, but also through meta-analysis papers (Grover & Furnham, 2016) which have brought together the research data to provide fresh insights and through systematic reviews, have sought to synthesize coaching research to provide an integrated understanding of published research (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2017). Through these meta-studies, we hope coaching psychology, in its many forms, can lead to the refinement of practice.

In the second paper, the topic of supervision is explored; its role and the growing evidence for its contribution as a tool to aid reflective practice. While the jury may still
be out in terms of the specific contribution which coaching supervision plays, there is
mounting evidence that supervision is a useful resource worthy of further research
(Hawkins, Turner, & Passmore, 2019).

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Henley Business School.
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 practitioners’ guides to academic texts. While there has been broad agreement over these years, the focus and emphasis have varied, reflecting the orientation and focus of different writers (e.g., Grant & Palmer, 2002; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; Whitmore, 1992).

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. Summarizing from previous discussions on the need for a standardized coaching definition, we conclude that marking the boundaries of a domain is vital for three reasons. First, it is essential for practice; a standardized 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), which encourages coaches to include an exploration of the nature

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of coaching during the contracting phase with clients, ensuring both have a shared understanding of the process and what the client can expect (International Coach Federation, 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., counseling) 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 characterization 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 subspecialized 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., counseling). Moreover, we summarize 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 the 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 from 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 consistency in this paper. Finally, we integrate key perspectives and findings from recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses on coaching to consider the 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 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 (Huston, 1924; Trueblood, 1911). As with Gordy, there is little description in these papers of the process, and no explicit definition of the term. Also, as with Gordy, the term appears to be used interchangeably with training. More workplace coaching papers were written during the 1930s (Bigelow, 1938). At the same time, sports coaching was developing too, where the first connections were made between coaching and psychology (Griffith, 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 sports 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 United States, along with Thomas Leonard (Brock, 2009), developed co-active coaching, which defined coaching as “a relationship of possibilities … based on trust, confidentiality” (Whitworth, Kinsey-House, & Sandahl, 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, counseling, 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, Cox, and Clutterbuck (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 behavioral 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 reinterpretation of coaching that reflects back the previous definitions; coaching is a relationship-based learning and development process.

SUBSPECIALIZED PRACTICES UNDER COACHING

As the coaching industry has grown, definitions have split into a series of subsets of coaching. These have included executive coaching, health coaching, and life coaching. The following sections summarize the definitions and characteristics of these most prevalent subspecialized 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, Duckworth, Birch, and 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, safety, and support.