

## **A Systematic Review (SR) of Coaching Psychology: Focusing on the Attributes of Effective Coaching Psychologists**

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**Abstract**

*Objective: Whilst a number of narrative reviews on coaching exist, there is yet no systematic review which summarises the evidence based in a transparent way. To this extent, we undertook a Systematic Review of Coaching Psychology evidence, following the initial scoping and consultation phase, this focused on Coaching Psychologists' attributes, such as the required knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, which are associated with the effectiveness of the coaching relationship and subsequent coaching results.*

*Design: Systematic Review is a methodology for locating, evaluating and synthesising relevant existing studies through a standardised and transparent way. The review process arises from a priori protocol which specifies the review topic, questions/hypotheses (which may refined through expert consultation and any existing reviews in the field) and review methods.*

*Methods: The initial search elicited 23,611 coaching papers by using 58 searching terms through eight electronic databases (e.g. PsyINFO). A total of 140 included studies were screened for further analysis by using seven inclusion criteria. Study results from the included papers were integrated and analysed by Narrative Synthesis method.*

*Conclusion: This SR confirmed that coaching relationship is the key focus of coaching research and practice. Besides, the professional psychological training / background was emphasised as an essential requirement for a professional coach to manage coachee's emotions. In addition, it highlighted that coaches' attributes have a significant influence on the effectiveness of coaching process and results. An initial Coaching Psychologist Competency Framework was outlined in this review which indicated the further research trend for the continuous development of Coaching Psychology.*

**Keywords:** Coaching Psychology, coaching relationship, Coaching Psychologist attributes, Systematic Review

## **Introduction**

Good literature reviews can inform us about current knowledge as well as gaps therein (Gough et al. 2012). However, we need systematic, explicit and accountable methods to produce reliable and replicable results for answering specific review hypotheses / questions, such as Systematic Review (SR). SR has been used progressively in the Social Sciences (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006); however SR is still rare in other fields such as in Industrial/Organisational Psychology (Rojon, McDowall & Saunders, 2011). This paper presents a SR of evidence on Coaching Psychology, where particular focus evolved on effective Coaching Psychologists' attributes. We now outline the principles of SR methodology, before introducing the research questions, which we refined by means of a pilot study and expert consultation, and then present our findings in detail.

### **What is a Systematic Review?**

Systematic Review (SR) is a specific methodology that locates existing studies, selects and evaluates contributions, analyses and synthesises data, and reports the evidence through a rigorous and transparent way that shows reasonably clear conclusions to be reached about what is and what is not known (Denyer & Tranfield, 2011). A SR usually starts with a prior specific protocol which includes the review topic, questions/hypotheses, inclusion criteria and review methods to test just a single hypothesis or a series of related hypotheses. Although varied methods for synthesis have been applied to SRs (such as Meta-Analysis and Narrative Synthesis), they depend on the nature and quality of the primary studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The overall review process thus comprises scoping and planning the review, searching and screening the references, and evaluating and synthesising the included studies.

## **The Advantages of a Systematic Review (SR) Method**

The advantages of SRs have been widely discussed, some key points are summarised in the following paragraph to defend the rationale for conducting a SR in the context of Coaching Psychology. Traditional narrative literature reviews can represent excellent overviews of wider literature and concepts, not just reviews of outcomes (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). However, if any review is not conducted through a rigorous and transparent process, critical studies might be neglected, as inclusion criteria may be based on the reviewer's personal research interests or the reviewer is unaware of relevant studies (Gough, 2012). Compared to traditional literature reviews, SR method can quickly assimilate a large amount of information through the critical exploration, evaluation and synthesis. It separates insignificant and redundant studies, which lack solid evidence to answer the research question, from critical studies which do (Greenhalgh, 1998). In addition, the well-defined methodology of SR mitigates research bias by explicitly identifying and rejecting studies using clearly defined a priori criteria. Hence, a SR produces more reliable and accurate conclusions by synthesising included studies than traditional methods do (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007).

## **Why is a SR of Coaching Psychology Needed?**

Coaching has been fast advancing in the organisational and leadership development field. International Coach Federation (ICF) Global Coaching Study (2012) stated, there are approximately 47,500 coaches worldwide (Western Europe, 37.5% and North America, 33.2%) and coaching has become a \$2 billion per-year global market. In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) 2010 Annual Report indicated that coaching is used in 82% of the U.K. organisations and it is rated as the most effective

activities of the Talent Management programmes (2012 CIPD Learning and Talent Development Annual Survey Report).

Despite the growth in popularity, issues remain which need to be addressed. Firstly, there is an on-going debate between psychologists and non-psychologists about whether psychological principles and training area are core requirements for a professional coach. A global survey (Newnham-Kanas et al. 2012) indicated a large percentage of coaches were with business backgrounds rather than psychological or behavioural science backgrounds (consultants 49.1%, formal educators, e.g. teachers and professors 20.8% and helping professionals, e.g. psychologists and counsellors 15.6%). Grant (2008) stated that contemporary professional coaching is a cross-disciplinary methodology, and not 'owned' by a particular professional group or association, which he considered both a strength and a liability. On the other hand, such diversity increases the difficulty to develop a standardised coaching definition, focus, result evaluation method and coaches' selection and development scheme (Sherman & Freas, 2004). Indeed, psychologists have increasingly and more publicly become involved in the coaching industry in 1990's, because the aim of executive or life coaching is to facilitate sustained cognitive, emotional and behavioural change (Douglas & MacCauley, 1999). In addition, a number of studies asserted that coaches without fundamental psychology knowledge may not be able to recognise coaching clients' mental health issues and may cause harm to coaching clients (Berglas, 2002; Naughton, 2002, Kauffman and Scoular, 2004 and Cavanagh, 2005). Therefore, to what extent a background in psychology is an essential requirement for a professional coach is still a point of debate. We decided to conduct a research with rigorous process to determine if psychology plays a crucial role in coaching study and practice from existing relevant studies.

Secondly, the research focus in coaching has shifted to the coaching relationship. Traditionally, focus in the field of coaching has been on specific models, approaches and techniques, directed towards ultimate goals for people's overall learning and development (de Haan & Sills, 2012). However, a meta-analysis (de Haan, 2008) indicated there is no significant difference in effectiveness between different coaching techniques. Based on this 'outcome equivalence' (de Haan, 2008), the quality of the coaching relationship as well as the coach and the coachee's role in the process were identified as the most effective common active ingredients for a positive coaching result (de Haan, 2008). A number of quantitative studies have also indicated a positive correlation between the coaching relationship and results, such as coachees' self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2009; Jackson, Boyce & Neal, 2010; de Haan & Duckworth, 2012). As the main purpose of coaching engagement is to facilitate coachee's change and improvement, the coachee's reaction and response are the most important and influential factor in the coaching process (de Haan, 2008). However, how the self of coach is used to establish and maintain the coaching relationship is crucial as coaching relationship is viewed as a professional helping relationship (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010). Therefore, people and interpersonal interactions play a key role in the coaching process (Palmer & McDowall, 2010 and O'Broin, 2010). A survey study (de Haan et al., 2011) examined and identified the "helpful" coach's qualities and behaviours that make the coaching journey effective to coachees and how coachees "feel" their learning and change through executive coaching. The study results indicated coaches' behaviours have a significant influence on coachees' learning process, for example listening, understanding and encouragement from the coach were viewed as the most helpful behaviours. Therefore, this study implied coach has the accountability to initiate and establish a constructive relationship in the coaching process. Given that the coach's role has a certain degree influence on the

establishment of coaching relationship; we decided to investigate to what extent a background in psychology facilitates a more effective coaching relationship.

In summary, the coach's role in the coaching process and effective attributes of a sound coaching relationship have been widely discussed (Boyatzis et al. 2006; Jones & Spooner, 2006; Orenstein, 2006; de Haan, 2008 and Palmer & McDowall, 2010). However, the existing evidence is not adequate to determine whether and what are specific combinations of personality/attributes produce greater effects of coaching relationship (de Haan, 2008 and Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). Further, we also need more rigorous studies to investigate on if background in psychology for a professional coach benefits to establishing an effective coaching relationship. Prior to any primary research, it would be helpful however to review the evidence in Coaching Psychology systematically to determine how new research can fit to existing knowledge gap through a transparent and systematic process.

Although some reviews (Grant 2001, Whybrow 2008; Bachkirova 2008; and Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011) have highlighted a critical role for psychology in coaching study and practice; these narrative literature reviews did not spell out explicit reviews topics, hypotheses, study selection criteria or review methods on which conclusions were based. Hence, these reviews may not be sufficiently robust. Therefore, a SR to synthesise relevant studies in the field based on a well-defined protocol is needed to determine to what extent psychology plays a crucial role in coaching study and practice, based on specific review questions with focus on coach's attributes and the coaching relationship.

Our overview process comprised three main phases, which we summarise here.

Insert Table 1. A Systematic Review Process:



### ***Stage One: Scoping the studies of the field and planning the review***

The first step ascertained if a SR was needed and developed a comprehensive review protocol including review topic, questions/hypotheses and methods.

Firstly, a pilot literature search was undertaken through PsyINFO, Business Complete, Index to Theses, Google Scholar and Cochrane Library in 2010 to verify there was no SR on coaching before commencement of this study. The searching terms used included “coaching”, “review” and “systematic”. Secondly, ten coaching experts (both academics or practitioners) from international locations were identified from Coaching focused journals and handbooks and through consultation with UK coaching experts and invited to participate as a review panel. The review panel included nine psychologists and one management researcher. They had on average ten years experiences in coaching practice and all undertook research in some capacity.

Insert Table 2. The Demographics of Review Panels

One-on-one interviews were conducted with each review panel member to elicit their perspectives on the key elements of Coaching Psychology, the aspects of existing coaching results evaluation methods and the comments on the draft review protocol. The interview schedule comprised three broad topics which were a) definitions of coaching and Coaching Psychology respectively, b) perspectives on evaluation criteria and processes to determine coaching results and effectiveness, and c) comments on the proposed review topic and questions, and database to base eventual searches on.

Qualitative integration of the interview responses elicited that “coaching is 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." On the other hand, "Coaching Psychology aims to help or facilitate *the non-clinical populations* for sustained behavioural changes through *psychological evidence-based interventions and process*. These interventions will help the coach to get deeper and richer pictures of coachees' behaviours, motivations, values and beliefs during the coaching process and facilitate coachees to achieve their goals. In addition, coach, coachee and organisational stakeholders all play the critical roles in the coaching process as the ultimate goals are to facilitate coachee's development in the *workplace* through *interactive communications with coach*. Moreover, the "coaching process and relationship" was highlighted across the interviews as being important, and most panel members indicated coaches have the responsibility to create a comfortable environment for enhancing an effective coaching relationship.

In summary, the SR panels believed applying psychological interventions in the coaching process does assist the coach to have a deeper understanding of coachee's behaviours and motivations for change. However, coaching contents and evaluations are very diverse and there is not enough existing empirical research to examine any one specific coaching framework, especially given that many coaches and studies adopted an integrative approach, rendering it difficult to elicit active ingredients in any one coaching orientation. Thus, the SR panels highlighted the shift to a relational coaching study and practice as coaching process is based on people's communications and interactions. The coach has the accountability to initiate a comfortable environment for the effective coaching relationship. Following the pilot search and consultation with the SR panels, the focus of this SR topic was agreed to investigate key successful factors for an effective coaching relationship, and to identify the essential attributes needed by a Coaching Psychologist to enhance the coaching relationship.

The finalised review questions are:

- (1) *How many and what kind of studies have evaluated Coaching Psychologist's attributes in a robust and systematic way?*
- (2) *What are the effective Coaching Psychologist's attributes (required knowledge, attitudes and skills) in the coaching process to enhance the coaching relationship?*

***Step Two: Undertaking the literature search and screening the references:***

The second step elicited relevant papers and screened the included studies for further review. The researcher used 58 search terms (e.g. cogniti\* and coaching) identified from key Coaching Psychology books (e.g. Handbook of Coaching Psychology) and the review panels. These terms were searched through eight electronic databases (e.g. PsyINFO) and 23,611 studies were retrieved. Consistent with SR methodology, seven prior inclusive criteria (e.g. empirical research which used psychological interventions in the coaching process) were adopted to filter studies by reading abstracts and skimming the paper contents. A total of 140 studies remained for further synthesis.

***Step Three: Evaluating and synthesising the included studies:***

This stage assessed study quality by identifying any significant bias and integrated the evidences among the included studies to seek answers of the review questions. In order to ensure each study would be analysed and synthesised consistently and objectively, key information (e.g. research methods, details of interventions and outcome of interests) from each study was extracted and summarised on an Excel file. (See table 3.)

Inset Table 3. The Example of Information Extracting Form

Firstly, the “research methods”, “coaching interventions” and “results evaluation schemes” of each included study were assessed to assure these studies are adequate for answering the research questions. Each paper was rated by adding up the scores gained from the three indicators mentioned above. (See Table 4.) The results from higher scored /rated studies were placed in higher priority when synthesising the included papers.

Insert Table 4. The Example of Study Appraisal / Evaluation Method

Subsequently, a Narrative Synthesis method (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) was adopted given that many included studies were conducted using qualitative research methods. The study results of each paper were outlined on the Excel table. Cross-study synthesis was undertaken through comparing the study results and selecting the most rated / examined ones. The study appraisal rate was considered while cross synthesising the study results. For example, the study results from a quantitative study (e.g. an experiment) were placed in the higher priority than the ones in a case report.

## **Findings:**

### ***Paper distributions and classifications***

The majority of the studies included in the final review (64 of 180 papers) based on the inclusion criteria had been published in psychology focused journals (e.g. International Coaching Psychology Review) and 40 were from business and management journals. These studies were sorted into four categories according to their respective research purposes by reading through their abstracts. The table below summarises the overview of what are the main coaching study focus up to date and presents one example:

Insert Table 5. Distributions and Classifications of the Included Studies

### ***Key factors for a positive coaching relationship***

Five key factors that enhance the coaching relationship were identified by synthesising 15 relevant included studies. These studies examined the relations between the coaching process and results and analysed factors influencing an effective coaching relationship. The researcher listed all included study results on an excel spreadsheet and outlined the most examined and highlighted effective factors for enhancing the coaching process. Subsequently, these effective factors were ranked by considering both the frequency they were examined/referred and the method used in the study. For example, the effective factors examined / rated from a quantitative study were placed in a higher order than the ones from a case study. The table below summarises the research methods and most examined effective factors:

Insert Table 6. The Overview of Five Key Factors for a Positive Coaching Relationship

***Building trust:*** Establishing and maintaining a trusting relationship was identified as one of the critical elements to enhance the coaching process. Three qualitative studies (one case study and two semi-structured interviews studies) indicated mutual trust between the coach and the coachee plays a key role to facilitate the coaching process. A case study (Freedom & Perry, 2010) that collected perspectives from one coach-coachee pair disclosed that the coachee would not feel alone and with little support until the coach is trustworthy and reliable. Two qualitative studies (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007 and O’Broin & Palmer, 2010) that investigated effective factors for a positive coaching relationship by interviewing coaches and coachees also emphasised the importance of trust in the coaching process. Trust was most frequently discussed in the interviews (O’Broin & Palmer, 2010), and nearly 92% of participants (11 of 12 interviewees) considered “trust” is one of the critical element to engage coachees. In addition, trust was rated as the second important variable influencing the employee coaching relationship in one survey study (Gregory & Levy, 2011). Therefore, establishing trust with coachees in the initial coaching process is a significant step for a constructive coaching relationship.

***Understanding and managing coachees’ emotional difficulties:*** Coping with coachees’ emotional reaction was recognised as a key factor in the coaching process as most coachees experienced anxiety, sadness and frustration while seeking help from coaches (de Haan et al., 2008). Three included studies from this SR focused on the examination of the correlation between coachees’ emotions and coaching relationship. A case study conducted by Freedman & Perry (2010) identified “helping coachees to contain and take the edge off the intensity of their emotions” will enable an effective coaching relationship. Another case report (Day,

2010) which investigated how unconscious organisation dynamics affect the effectiveness of coaching relationship highlighted whether a coach possesses the emotional maturity and confidence to work with difficult emotional material is a critical element for enhancing a positive coaching relationship. Unconscious dynamics in organisations can be understood as arising in a wider psychosocial context (Lewin, 1952), which is made up of the interplay of psychological, social, economic, power and political processes (Holti, 1997). In this study, the subsequent exploration of the dynamics of the coaching relationship helped the coachee to understand at a deeper level his struggle in the organisation and to take up a different position in the organisation dynamics. In addition, de Haan et al. (2008) undertook a qualitative research (IPA) into 28 experienced coaches' critical moments in the coaching process. This study demonstrated that coaches' critical moments in the coaching process are highly influenced by coachees' emotions. These critical moments and emotional reactions can be opportunities for insight and change in the coaching relationship. From this study, coaches reported using supervision to help them to make sense of critical moments and respond appropriately. In summary, coaches and coachees both undergo some critical moments (emotional difficulties) in the coaching process because coachees' anxiety and frustration have a strong influence on coaches' emotions. Thus, managing these emotions and transferring them into positive insights for coachees to change is a crucial factor for an effective coaching relationship.

***Two way communication:*** Effective communication process was also considered as an essential ingredient for a harmonious coaching relationship from this SR. It includes active listening and questioning, mutual feedback, space for story sharing and appropriate verbal and body language. Listening and appropriate feedback were rated and examined as a main dimension for evaluating a positive employee coaching relationship in two survey studies

(Gregory & Levy, 2010 and 2011). A case study (Robinson, 2010) also investigated how to apply literary techniques (using story-telling, analogy, and metaphors) to analyse and interpret coaching conversations to enable sense-making and enhancement of insightful questioning, interpretation and reflective practice. This study indicated there is a positive relation between the application of literary techniques and coaching relationship. From this SR, maintaining effective communication process through highly developed listening, questioning, feedback and language-using skills will enhance the understanding between the coach and the coachee and their relationship.

***Facilitation and help:*** Facilitating and helping coachees' learning and development to meet needs was highlighted as a key ingredient to enhance the coaching relationship from this SR. According to Baron and Morin's within-subject experimental study (2009) with 73 participants who attended a leadership development programme, coach's facilitating learning and results skills are positively associated with working alliance. Facilitating development was also examined and confirmed as a key dimension for evaluating the effectiveness of coaching relationship in a quantitative study by Gregory and Levy (2010). In addition, half of the participants (6 of 12 interviewees) in a qualitative study (O'Broin and Palmer, 2010) emphasised two-way relationship (e.g. collaboration and facilitation) in the coaching process could help the coach to have a better understanding of coachee's needs and to develop a shared goal. This process will also facilitate coach to engage the coachee and establish a better relationship.

***Clear contract and transparent process:*** Having a clear contract and transparent coaching process was viewed as one key factor for establishing a positive relationship at the initial stage of the coaching engagement. The case study undertaken by Freedman and Perry



(2010) indicated it was really helpful for establishing a trusting relationship after the coach explained the process, both parties' accountabilities, evaluation methods and confidential issues. In addition, an IPA study (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007) which investigated nine participants' experience of coaching demonstrated "transparency" was considered very positively associated with a valuable coaching relationship. For instance, the coachees felt included and engaged when the coach explained the process and theories supporting the coaching interventions before any sessions commenced.

In summary, building trust, understanding and managing coachees' emotional difficulties, having two way communication process, facilitating coachees' learning and development and having a clear contract and transparent process were identified as the top five critical factors for enhancing the coaching process. These factors were also considered and integrated into the next stage data synthesis, which aimed to analyse key attributes for a professional coach to enhance the coaching relationship.

### ***An initial Coaching Psychologist Competency Framework***

A total of 32 included studies which investigated key coaches' attributes to enhance a constructive coaching relationship were synthesised in this review. As discussed above, how the self of coach is used to interact with coachee for an effective coaching relationship and positive results is crucial (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010 and de Haan, 2008). A study (de Haan et al., 2011) identified effective executive coaches' behaviours that benefit to coaching relationship from coachees' views through questionnaires. This study indicated certain coaches' knowledge/experience; behaviours and qualities are "helpful" for enhancing an effective and constructive coaching process. The study results provided an overview of what coachees consider and expect of a "helpful" coach; also implied more research to examine

specific aspects of effective coaches' attributes is required. Prior to any primary research, it is essential to examine the existing evidence through a systematic process. The 32 included papers comprise 12 quantitative, 11 qualitative and nine mixed methods studies. (See Table. 7)

Insert Table 7. The Overview of Coaches' Effective Attributes Studies

According to Bartram (2008), a comprehensive person specification for a job role includes knowledge, skills, ability and other characteristics (such as personality and attitudes etc.) Therefore, study results from these included papers were sorted into three competence groups i) required knowledge and experiences, ii) personality/attitudes and iii) skills and behaviours. All included study results were listed on an excel spreadsheet. Most examined and highlighted effective attributes for a coach were outlined. Subsequently, these effective attributes were ranked by considering both the frequency they were examined / referred and the methods used in the study. Top ranked attributes were integrated and outlined as an Initial Coaching Psychologist Competency Framework (see Table. 8). The structure of the competency framework was based on the

Insert Table 8. An Initial Coaching Psychologist Competency Framework

**Required knowledge:** This section outlines relevant knowledge / educational backgrounds required for a professional coach. Three key areas were identified after synthesising eight relevant included papers: i) psychological relevant knowledge / educational backgrounds, ii) psychological coaching framework / process and iii) leadership and organisational management knowledge. A quantitative study (Wasylyshyn, 2003) with 87 participants rated "graduate level training in psychology" as the most important criterion (82%) when they

select a coach. Six included studies which focused on the examination of the relations between coachees' emotions and coaching process also disclosed coping with coachees' reactions effectively is a key requirement for a professional coach. These two studies indicated having an appropriate psychological training / educational background will assist the coach to identify and manage emotional reactions and difficulties from coachees. This will also facilitate the coaching process. In addition, a qualitative study by Maritz et al. (2009) emphasised a professional coach should be acquainted with certain level concepts of organisational management, leadership / people development and business acumen because most of the coachees' issues were associated with their workplaces and colleagues. In summary, appropriate training in psychology and being acquainted with most frequently used psychological coaching interventions and certain degree of organisational / leadership management concepts will provide a professional coach to have a fundamental knowledge base to articulate an effective coaching process.

***Personalities/Attitudes:*** This section summarises the effective attitudes / personalities a professional coach should possess to facilitate their relationships with coachees. Five most highlighted attitudes for a coach were outlined after integrating results from four included studies (Wasylyshyn, 2003, Stevens, 2005, Maritz et al., 2009 and Passmore, 2010) which investigated both coaches' and coachees' perspectives by interviews and questionnaires. They are i) openness/honesty/authenticity, ii) integrity / confidentiality, iii) non-judgemental / objective, iv) enthusiasm / passion, and v) commitment / motivation to help.

***Skills:*** Three key skills were identified after cross-analysing results from the 32 included papers that studied the critical competences for a professional coach. First, communication skills were rated and emphasised most from coaches', coachees' and coaching purchasers' perspectives and expectations (Longenecker & Neubert, 2005; Maritz et al., 2009; Passmore,

2010; Griffiths & Campbell, 2008 and Dagley, 2011). They include listening and reflecting back actively, powerful questioning, providing and seeking feedback and using appropriate verbal and body language. Second, establishing a constructive relationship with coachees was highlighted from several included studies (Longenecker & Neubert, 2005 and Maritz et al., 2009). From the study results, demonstrating empathy and supporting and engaging coachees were emphasised as the effective behaviours for a professional coach to build a positive coaching relationship. Third, facilitating coachees' learning and development was also remarked by most participants in several included studies (Longenecker & Neubert, 2005; Griffiths & Campbell, 2008 and Maritz et al., 2009). The key behaviours include helping to set the appropriate goals and actions and managing progress and accountability.

In conclusion, the attributes for a professional coach identified from this SR could be a basis for the further Coaching Psychology study to develop and examine a Coaching Psychologist Competency Framework.

## **Discussion:**

This is the first SR in the coaching domain which examined the role of Coaching Psychology in contemporary coaching study and practice through a rigid and transparent process. The review results ascertained Coaching Psychologist's attributes (required knowledge, attitudes/personality and skills) have a significant influence on the effectiveness of coaching relationship and results. Five key points were summarised from the review findings which are also in response to the review questions / hypotheses in the protocol consulted with the review panels.

First, this SR confirmed that coaching processes and the relationship are the key foci of coaching research and practice. One-third of the included studies (47 of 140 papers)

highlighted the link between the coaching relationship and coaching results and investigated the effective coaches' attributes for facilitating a constructive coaching relationship. These studies were mainly conducted in qualitative research methods (12 semi-structured interviews, seven case studies and one longitudinal observation report). The rest of the papers comprise six experiments, 15 surveys and eight mix-methods studies.

Second, in the papers reviewed here, the professional psychological training / professional background was emphasised as an essential requirement for a professional coach. Coachees' emotional reactions / moments were recognised as the key turning points and opportunities to facilitate coachees' motivations for change. A coach who is able to apply psychological interventions appropriately to identify and manage coachees' emotional difficulties facilitates a better relationship in the coaching process (de Haan et al., 2008; Day, 2010; Freedman & Perry, 2010 and Gregory & Levry, 2011). In addition, a quantitative study (Wasylyshyn, 2003) with 87 participants rated "graduate level training in psychology" as the most important criterion (82%) for a professional coach. As discussed above, coaching is still not a standardised and accredited profession due to the diversity of coaches' prior professional backgrounds. Although a few traditional literature reviews (Grant 2001, Whybrow 2008; Bachkirova 2008; and Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011) highlighted the importance of applying psychological interventions in the coaching field, this SR is the first review based on the explicit search terms and well-defined review process to confirm having a background in psychology will assist the coach to have a deeper understanding of coachees' issues and to facilitate their motivations to change. More precisely, psychological training is an essential requirement for a professional coach.

Third, this SR highlighted that coaches' attributes have a significant influence on the effectiveness of coaching process and results. Five effective factors (building trust,

understanding and managing coachees' emotional difficulties, having two way communication process, facilitating coachees' learning and development and having a clear contract and transparent process) for a constructive coaching relationship outlined from this SR are all associated with coaches' attitudes and competences. The initial Coaching Psychologist Competency Framework summarised from this SR also provide an overview of what attributes a professional coach should acquire to facilitate an effective coaching process. These findings indicated that coaches' attitudes and behaviours demonstrated in the coaching process have a significant impact on the coachees' emotions and reactions. Therefore, coaches have the accountability to initiate and maintain an effective relationship in the coaching process based on observing attitudes and skills outlined from the included studies.

Nevertheless, this SR concluded that more rigorous empirical studies are required as most of the existing coaching studies (approximately 70%) were undertaken by qualitative methods such as case studies and interviews. In addition, 65% of the included studies evaluated the coaching results solely based on coachees' personal satisfactions and attitude changes rather than tracking their behavioural or performance improvement. Therefore, the future research should emphasise on the improvement of research methods and coaching result evaluation approaches to ensure producing more rigorous and replicable study results.

Finally, this SR identified the future research trends for the development of Coaching Psychology. The researcher summarised key attributes for a professional coach from the included studies, which will enhance the coaching relationship (including required knowledge, attributes/personalities and skills). These attributes and features were integrated into an initial Coaching Psychologist Competency Framework (see Table 8.) which also indicated further research trends in Coaching Psychology field. As discussed above, coaches' diverse backgrounds increase the difficulty to develop a standardised coaching definition, focus, result evaluation method and coaches' selection and development scheme

(Sherman & Freas, 2004). This draft sketch outlined from the existing evidence could be a foundation for the future coaching studies which intend to develop and validate a competency framework for professional coaches.

In conclusion, there is still a big debate about whether having a background in psychology is an essential requirement for a professional coach. Although a few narrative literature reviews have ascertained the critical role psychology plays in the coaching field and certain psychological interventions (e.g. CBC and Solution-focused method) were verified their effectiveness to enhance the coaching result through quantitative studies. These evidences are still not solid enough to confirm the psychological standings in coaching field. The previous reviews on Coaching Psychology (Grant 2001, Whybrow 2008; Bachkirova 2008; and Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011) which did not define clear review criteria and methods may not generate replicable results. Prior undertaking more rigorous primary studies to facilitate the development of Coaching Psychology, an overview of what we have from existing evidences and what focus should be emphasised on in the future research to fill in the knowledge gaps is an essential step. This SR is the first review which synthesised all relevant coaching studies through a standard and rigid process to investigate the subsequent development trends for Coaching Psychology. The review results assured coaching relationship is the key factor for enhancing the effectiveness of coaching results and the coach has the accountability to initiate and manage an effective coaching process. Because five crucial ingredients (e.g. building trust and facilitating the development and learning) for a constructive coaching relationship outlined from the included studies are all associated with coaches' attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, a total of 32 included papers intended to identify the effective attributes for a coach to facilitate the coaching relationship. Having a psychological background to manage coachees' emotions and have a deeper understanding of their issues was emphasised as the essential criterion for a professional coach. However, most

(70%) of the included studies were still undertaken through qualitative research methods (e.g. case reports and interviews). Therefore this SR concluded that the future Coaching Psychology research should continue investigating the effective attributes for a professional coach and what sorts of psychological interventions / concepts should be included in a professional coaching training programme through the rigorous research methods and process.



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