



Aston Business School



A critical evaluation of the outcome research dominating the field of executive coaching

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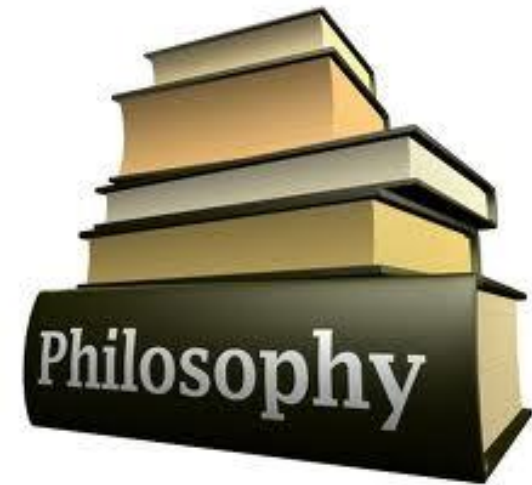
Presentation Context


Fundamental questions remain unanswered:

- What does effective coaching look like?
- What variables impact on effectiveness?
- What are the underlying processes that explain executive coaching effectiveness?
- How can coaches amend their practice to ensure effectiveness is maximised?

Questions remain unanswered because:

- **Implicit philosophical assumptions**
- **Lack of powerful & precise theory**
- **Flawed methodology**




Theory



What is the current situation of coaching research philosophy?



Why is this problematic?

The philosophical assumptions are not explicit

- Assumptions are unexamined
 - Is this an accurate way of conceptualising coaching?
 - Would alternative approaches be more appropriate?
- Diversity in philosophical approaches can lead to new research questions and alternative insights into traditional questions
- Methodology should match philosophy
- Tacit commitment to philosophy makes appropriate evaluation difficult

Recommendations for philosophy of coaching research

- Identify philosophical stance
- Assumptions should be made explicit in research reports
- Methodology should match these assumptions
- Interpretation should match assumptions and methodology
- Research can then be evaluated by others based on these assumptions

Why is theory of coaching effectiveness important?



Enables understanding and prediction
by explaining complex phenomena

Effectiveness
can be
maximised



Theory

Current theoretical situation & recommendations

- Lack of defined theory of effectiveness (Bennett, 2006; Brotman, Liberi & Wasylyshyn, 1998; Lowman, 2005)
- Existing models are not testable and are too complex to facilitate understanding and prediction (i.e. Kilburg (2001); Joo (2005))
- Theory needs strong **explanatory** power to increase understanding & precise **predictive** power to accurately estimate effective coaching conditions
- Existing theories from other areas of management and psychology should be utilised
- Coaching process may need to be broken down into separate theories

Importance of rigorous research methods

- Methods should reflect good practice
- Are your methods reliable & valid?
- Has bias been minimised?
- How can we be sure that any change is due to the coaching and not some other variable?
- ‘Gold Standard’ of research = randomised controlled group studies

Current situation with coaching research methodology

- Proliferation of uncontrolled or case studies (Grant, 2003; Grant et al., 2010)
- Total of just 11 controlled group studies to-date
- Number of challenges in achieving the gold standard of research in a field setting
- More scientific foundation of executive coaching for it to evolve (Lowman, 2005)

Main issues with coaching research methodology

- Lack of rigorous methods create room for error
- The 'outcome' problem
 - Large variation of outcome measures
 - Makes comparison difficult
 - Abstract measures have little practical applicability
 - Reliance on self-report measures
- Small sample sizes lack statistical power
- Incomplete methodological reporting in journals

Recommendations for coaching research methodology

- Methodology should follow best practice used in related research (i.e. training & psychotherapy evaluation)
- Outcome measures should be meaningful and useful to both business & research
- Power calculated in advance to determine the required sample size
- Guidance provided regarding how to successfully conduct RCT's in the field



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Thank you for listening.

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Development of a Perceived Coaching Effectiveness Scale

- Developing a scale to measure perceived executive coaching effectiveness.
- Need coachees who will be happy to complete the scale to enable reliability and validity to be checked
- If you are interested in assisting with this project by sending the scale to your clients please leave me your email and I can get in touch