OP Matters Response

As a PhD student conducting research in the field of executive coaching effectiveness, I read Prof. Rob Briner's article "Does coaching work and does anyone really care?" in the last edition of OP Matters with great interest.

I felt compelled to write a response for two reasons. Firstly, following my studies in reviewing the coaching literature, I wanted to add my own contribution regarding what is needed in the coaching research field. Secondly, to provide the coaching researchers perspective regarding how new research is attempting to solve these issues, particularly regarding Prof. Briner's observations of the limited evidence of coaching effectiveness.

The majority of Prof. Briner's observations, while accurate, are not new (as I am sure he would agree). In fact they are reiterated frequently in the various coaching reviews that get published on a regular basis (including those listed in Prof. Briner's article). What are missing, are some tangible solutions to these problems.

It is clear that more RCT's are needed to further our understanding of the effectiveness of coaching. However how do academics and practitioners wishing to conduct research solve the very real problem of identifying organizations who will allow the levels of access and control needed to sufficiently conduct said trials? We all know it is challenging but necessary, so information and advice from those few who have successfully managed this would benefit the whole field.

Prof. Briner quite rightly notes that outcomes other than the short term and self-reported are needed – but what exactly? Some studies have utilized objective performance outcomes (For example, Bowles, Cunningham, De La Rosa & Picano, 2007; Bowles & Picano, 2006; Olivero, Bane & Kopelman, 1997) however these are generally context specific, meaning that the same measures cannot be used in other studies in different settings. Reliable and valid outcome measures need to be agreed upon and consistently used across research studies in order to increase knowledge and understanding regarding coaching outcomes. Perhaps utilizing more generic outcomes such as turnover, promotion, and absenteeism would be of greater use, as these measures are applicable to all jobs.

In relation to my own research, I am hoping to tackle some of the issues raised by Prof. Briner. For example, in the article, he notes that a meta-analysis is needed to provide evidence regarding whether coaching leads to important and sustained outcomes. This is something which I am currently working on and hope to have completed shortly. In addition to this, the main body of my PhD research will consist of a RCT within an organization utilizing a combination of short term, long term, self-report and objective measures.

While Prof. Briner's observations are accurate, the discussion now needs to progress past this point. Reviews on coaching research spanning the last decade have made these same points time and time again and yet very little has actually changed in relation to the type of research being conducted. Perhaps like coaching practice itself, the coaching literature needs to become more solution and less problem focused. Discussions which now need to be taking place should

acknowledge that these issues exist but most importantly present solutions to help researchers move understanding of coaching outcomes forward.

References

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