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9th European Conference on Positive Psychology June 27–30, 2018

Budapest, Hungary

Embracing the 'Bad' along with the 'Good' as Part of a Positive Psychology Coaching Dialogue

Facilitator:

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Dr. Ceri M Sims is a coaching psychologist, senior lecturer and researcher at Buckinghamshire New University, UK where she teaches on the applied positive psychology masters degree programme and runs positive psychology coaching courses. Ceri is a member of the International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP) and British Psychological Society's Special group in Coaching Psychology, is International Editorial Adviser for the European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology and member of the advisory team for the ISCP's International Centre for Coaching Psychology Research. She is also external examiner for the Masters in Coaching Psychology at University College Cork.

Learning outcomes:

This workshop aims to meet the following key learning outcomes and develop practical tools including:

- An appreciation of developing flexible appreciative coaching methods that embrace both the light and shadow of individuals and systems.
- Skills in expanding an appreciative mindset to working with resistance in coachees.
- Skills in listening appreciatively and creating generative questions for coachees who are facing difficult emotions such as frustration, anger, anxiety, shame and despair.

Background:

The application of approaches to coaching that embrace the ethos of positive psychology are flourishing, with solution-focus (Cavanagh & Grant, 2014) and appreciative inquiry approaches (Orem, Binkert & Clancy, 2011) offering the means by which coaches can support positive change through adopting a focus on strengths, competences and achievements and moving away from deficit discourse. Whilst these approaches can be transformational, their success depends upon the coaches' ability to adopt flexibility within their chosen models. In particular, the way of being a positive psychology coach involves appreciating with honesty, empathy and care the frame of reference of the coachee even when they harbour difficult experiences and the language of problems rather than those of hope and possibility.

Positive psychology is moving into a second wave (Held, 2004; Ivtzan et al., 2015; Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014; Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016) or PP2.0 (Wong, 2011), a development that cautions against adopting a polarised view that fails to embrace a nuanced appreciation of the 'positive' and 'negative' sides of people's lives. Sims (2017) argues that allowing coachees to tell their story to express themselves freely is important and that second wave positive psychology coaching with difficult emotions involves engaging with the coexistence, compatibility and contextual nature of the emotional landscape of coachees when supporting them in their quest towards achieving their goals. The current workshop focuses on developing constructive coaching tools for embracing the shadow side of coachees and learning skills of creating generative questions that work with difficulties within an appreciative coaching framework.

Content:

1. Background to second wave positive psychology coaching – including risks of adopting an inflexible positivity approach.
2. Expanding the appreciative approach to a much broader and person-centered mindset of listening for resistance and difficult experiences that are accompanied by challenging emotions in coachees.
3. Engaging with the shadow as well as with the light within appreciative or solution focused coaching conversations.
4. Developing and practicing generative questions that work with and through the shadow within an appreciative frame to support coachees in recognising their reflected best selves, creative solutions and transformative outcomes.

References:

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3. Ivtzan, I., Lomas, T., Hefferon, K., & Worth, P. (2015). *Second wave positive psychology: Embracing the dark side of life*. London: Routledge.
4. Kashdan, T., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2014). *The upside of your dark side: Why being your whole self-not just your "good" self-drives success and fulfillment*. New York: Penguin.
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