POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY COACHING

- USING RESEARCH IN COACHING PRACTICE

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UPDATED ABSTRACT
ABSTRACT

Many theoretical principles and interventions from positive psychology lend themselves well to coaching. A wealth of literature has been written on the subject over the last couple of years. This paper is based on a review of the literature on positive psychology coaching, which is part of a PhD-project on the use of theoretical principles and interventions from positive psychology in evidence-based coaching.

Objective: The objective of this paper is to give the participants an overview of the literature on positive psychology coaching.

Design: The literature is primarily identified through searches in PsycINFO and handsearching. The present paper focuses on literature that explicitly uses the terms positive psychology and coaching.

Methods: The literature is analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Preliminary results will be presented focusing on yearly production, types of literature, published vs. unpublished, peer reviewed vs. non-peer reviewed, theoretical material vs. empirical material, most productive authors, and trends in the literature.

Conclusion: The paper concludes with a few guidelines for how to apply theoretical principles and interventions from positive psychology in coaching psychology practice.
# BACKGROUND

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## EBBE LAVENDT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Authorized psychologist, University of Copenhagen, Master of Applied Positive Psychology, University of Pennsylvania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Consultant and PhD-student; founder and first chairman of the Danish Society of Evidence-Based Coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplaces</td>
<td>Center for Positive Psychology and The Department of Leadership and Strategy, University of Southern Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td>Coaching, teaching and research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special interests</td>
<td>Positive psychology and evidence-based coaching</td>
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</tbody>
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RESEARCH QUESTION

My PhD-project and the present literature review grew out of a question from participants in positive psychology training courses: How do we use this material in coaching?

Most quantitative research focuses on what. What correlates with what? And what causes what?

Course participants were interested in how. How do we use the research, the theories and the interventions from positive psychology in coaching practice?

Existing literature on positive psychology coaching partly answers this question – especially the existing qualitative and theoretical research.

OBJECTIVE
The objective of this paper is simply to give the participants an overview of the literature on positive psychology coaching.
PHD-PROJECT ON POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY COACHING

The present literature review is part of a PhD-project on positive psychology coaching.

The project is divided into three parts:

1. A review of the existing literature on positive psychology coaching
2. Interviews with experienced positive psychology coaches on how they apply theoretical principles and interventions from positive psychology in coaching
3. Development of a theory on positive psychology coaching and simple guidelines for practice

DEFINITION OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY COACHING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Individual positive psychology coaching is a conversation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td>where a coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>via research, theories and methods from positive psychology intentionally helps explore and/or handle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>a coachee’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>problems and/or challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>in an attempt to develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>optimal performance and/or well-being – physically, mentally and/or socially -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>in a private and/or professional context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive psychology coaching is a sub-category of coaching psychology
LITERATURE SEARCH

The literature was identified through several search strategies:

Searches in PsycINFO using the search terms:
- Positive psychology coach*
- Positive psychology AND coach*

Handsearching:
- References in all material found
- Conference proceedings from conferences on coaching psychology and positive psychology

Requesting information from experts in the field:
- Positive Psychology Coaching Group on LinkedIn
- Coaching SIG on UPenn's Master of Applied Positive Psychology Community
- The most productive authors
COACHING PSYCHOLOGY LITERATURE

THE FOCUS OF THIS LITERATURE REVIEW
SELECTION CRITERIA

Most coaching research focus on increasing either performance (optimal functioning) and/or well-being. This overlaps with my definition of positive psychology coaching.

Much of literature that could be considered positive psychology coaching has not been labeled as such by the authors.

Including most coaching research in the literature review would not make much sense.

The difficult challenge has been to define objective criteria for what literature to include and what not to include.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

Literature that incorporate the following criteria are included:

- Positive psychology coach* in title, abstract, key concepts, and/or all fields
- Positive psychology AND coach* in title, abstract, key concepts, and/or subtitles
- Literature that mention coaching and positive psychology constructs, and/or positive interventions written by an author who has used the words positive psychology and coach* in other references already on the list
- Literature published in a coaching journal or presented at a coaching conference that mention positive psychology several times
- Literature published in a positive psychology journal or presented at a positive psychology conference that mention coaching several times
INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Coaching research that other authors in the field consider relevant to positive psychology
- Articles in Positive Psychology News Daily under the category of coaching that mention coaching several times
- Literature that describe how to apply positive psychology in counselling

TYPES OF MATERIAL INCLUDED

In order to get the fullest understanding of how to conduct positive psychology coaching several types of material were included:

- Articles
- Dissertations, master theses and capstones
- Posters
- Papers, presentations, masterclass materials, workshop materials, and manuals
- Books and chapters
- Annotated bibliographies, book reviews and editorials
EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Literature that incorporate the following criteria are excluded:

- Positive psychology coach* in all fields, where the term only appears on the list of references
- Coaching literature that mention positive psychology, but primarily focuses on deficits
- Literature that mention positive psychology and coaching without elaborating on the topic
- Literature from before 1998, when positive psychology officially started

Of all the literature I have looked at, 187 pieces met the criteria for being included in this literature review.

EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT, BUT MOSTLY EXCLUDED MATERIAL

There is a wealth of literature on coaching that includes positive psychology constructs and/or positive interventions – for example:

- Appreciative inquiry
- Emotional intelligence
- Flow
- Happiness
- Hope
- Job satisfaction
- Mindfulness
- Motivation
- Quality of life
- Resilience
- Strengths
- Wellness

Only a fraction of these are included.
PRELIMINARY RESULTS

SEARCH RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive psychology coach*</th>
<th>Positive psychology AND coach*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstracts</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>All fields</td>
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<td>461</td>
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SEARCH RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive psychology in title</th>
<th>Positive psychology in abstract</th>
<th>Positive psychology in key concepts</th>
<th>Positive psychology in all fields</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach* in title</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach* in abstract</td>
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<td>53 (5)</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coach* in key concepts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach* in all fields</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>461 (20)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

73 unique references in PsycINFO when excluding the 461 in all fields

ONLY 26 REFERENCES USE THE TERM POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY COACHING
Positive psychology coaching has become more common and hence it has received a **growing attention** in literature.

As illustrated by the chart, literature on positive psychology coaching began appearing in 2001, however, scarce up until 2007.

In contrast, 2007-2010 has seen the burgeoning of relevant literature.

There seem to be a **stable production** of around 42 references per year.
ARTICLES ACCOUNT FOR 46 % (N = 187)

- Articles
- Dissertations, master theses and capstones
- Posters
- Papers, presentations, masterclasses, workshops and manuals
- Books and chapters
- Annotated bibliographies, book reviews and editorials

81 % OF THE LITERATURE IS PUBLISHED

Number (N = 187)
ONLY 40% IS PEER REVIEWED (N = 187)

60% of the material would be excluded from most reviews

36% OF THE REFERENCES INCLUDE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL
EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

There is a wide variety of research. From a mixed methods perspective this is a good thing. If the Gold Standard is used to evaluate the research, the quality is bad.

Most of the quantitative research is not practitioner friendly in that it does not clearly describe how the coaching was conducted.

Some authors do not even name the type of coaching they employed.

Some authors use real-life examples in chapters to illustrate how they work. These examples are sometimes called case studies.

Some of the empirical material is reported several times in different types of literature. Thus, both primary and secondary sources are included in the reported 36% empirical material.
SIX AUTHORS ARE INVOLVED IN 43 % OF THE LITERATURE (N = 187)

From initial reading, it is my impression that there is a great deal of:

- Focus on strengths, strengths assessments and strengths interventions
- Focus on positive interventions
- Focus on well-being as the primary outcome variable (not performance)
- Relabeling of old topics — now named positive psychology
- Borrowing of theoretical principles and techniques from the solution focused approach and from appreciative inquiry
- Optimism about the potential of combining positive psychology and coaching
There is not enough research to support one “right way” of applying theoretical principles and interventions from positive psychology in coaching psychology practice.

At the moment the right way is what works for you and your coachees.

Follow the guidelines from evidence-based coaching:

- Use what you consider the best available research in each case.
- Integrate it in the way you work.
- Adapt it to your coachees and the context.
FUTURE RESEARCH WILL HOPEFULLY HAVE A BROADER FOCUS THAN THE EFFICACY OF POSITIVE INTERVENTIONS
We need more research – especially on:

- The *coachees* and what goes on outside the coaching sessions
- What characterizes good coaching *relationships* and how to “train” coaches (and clients) in forming good relationships
- What characterizes good positive psychology *coaches* and how to “train” coaches in becoming good coaches
- How to get the most out of *expectancy* and *allegiance* factors

And we will of course also see more research on *models* and *techniques*.

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My own research will include:

- An *annotated bibliography* of positive psychology coaching
- A formal *literature review*
- *Video recorded interviews* with experts in the field
- A *theoretical description* of possible ways of using research, theoretical principles and interventions from positive psychology in coaching psychology

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**FUTURE RESEARCH IN GENERAL**
NEXT STEP

WHAT TO READ

For an overview of coaching literature see Anthony Grant

For an overview of positive interventions see Timothy So & Carol Kauffman (and Nancy Sin & Sonja Lyubomirsky, 2009; Stephen Schueller, in press)

For practical advice see Robert Biswas-Diener, Carol Kauffman, Alex Linley, and case studies

For practical models see Lucy Ryan

For discussions on positive psychology coaching see Positive Psychology Coaching Group on LinkedIn, and Positive Psychology News Daily
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

The list of references is probably incomplete. If you know of any relevant literature that ought to be included, please contact me at el@positivepsychology.dk. Thanks!

This presentation can be downloaded from http://www.positivepsychology.dk/iccp.html


If you want more information on upcoming research on positive psychology coaching, send me an email.