



SIOPSA

BUSTING MYTHS

IN COACHING PSYCHOLOGY

ABOUT THE BUSTING MYTHS SERIES

The profession of Industrial psychology places a high premium on its constituents' ability to balance the roles of a scientist (developing and test theories) and practitioner (solving real-world problems) (Van Vuuren, 2010; Walker, 2008). When industrial psychologists are able to balance these roles, they are celebrated as scientist-practitioners (Highhouse & Schmitt, 2013) or evidence-based practitioners (Briner & Rousseau, 2011). If you would like to gauge what the prevalence is of an evidence-based approach is in your community of practitioners, reflect on the questions proposed in Addendum A. Even though this is an envisioned state for all practitioners, there continues to be a gap between the science and practice of industrial psychology for many professionals (Rynes-Weller, 2012). For example, there might be scientific evidence that discounts commonly held beliefs among practitioners and their stakeholders. Additionally, personal encounters in the workplace might make practitioners sceptical about scientific discoveries. The divide between the science and practice of industrial psychology makes the field susceptible to myths (non-evidence based beliefs) in everyday practice, which might cause harm to professionals and their clients (Rynes-Weller, 2012). It is, therefore, essential to close the gap by addressing and disputing common myths in industrial psychology.

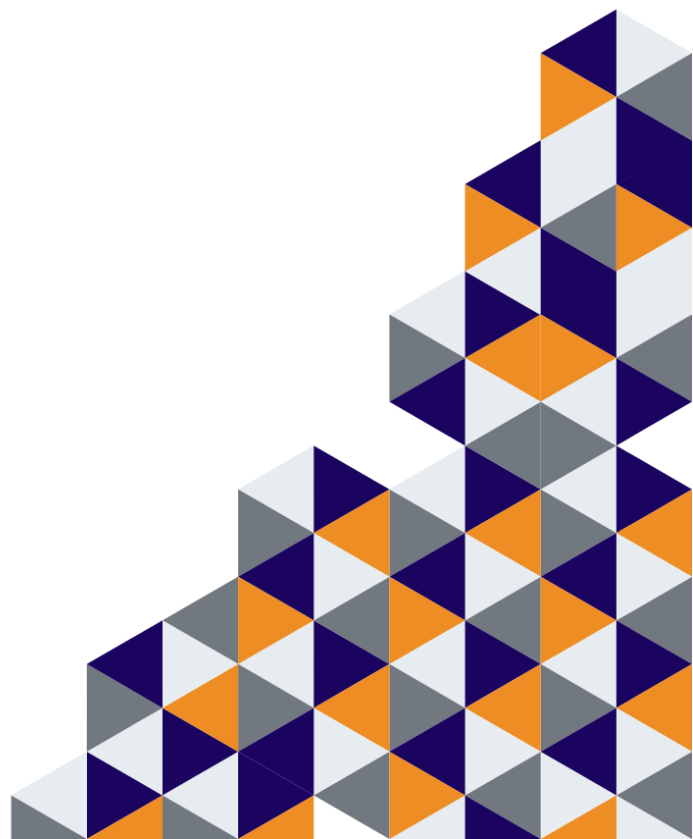
The aim of this working paper will be to bust myths in coaching psychology. The working paper is a result of the collaborative effort of the Johannesburg Regional Branch and Interest Group in Coaching and Consulting Psychology (IGCCP SA).

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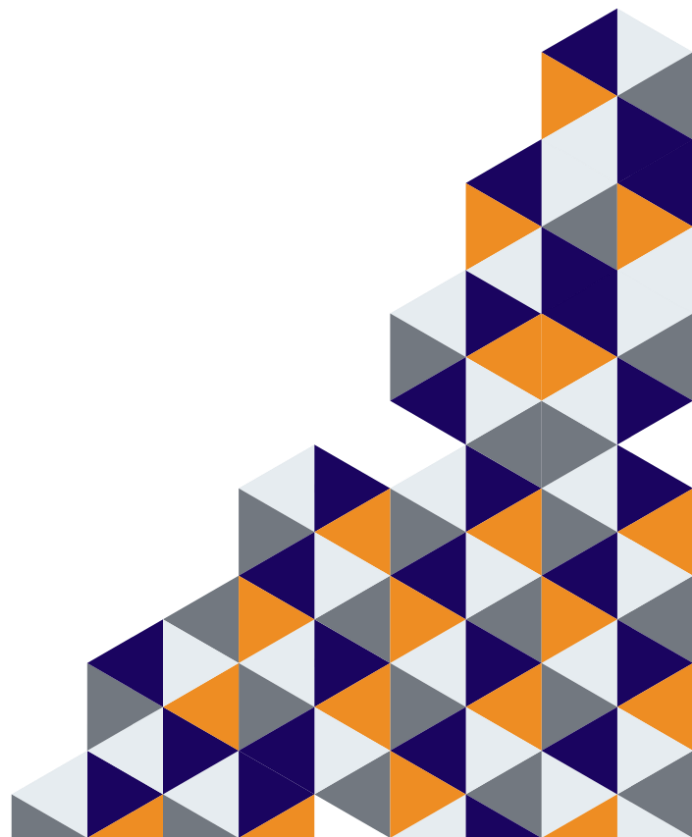
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1. POINTS OF DEPARTURE

1.1 The role of coaching

There is agreement amongst academics that the role of coaching encompasses the following: “the process of exploring stories in all situations requires mindful, reflective responsiveness rather than reactivity. The task here is for the coach and the client to notice and reflect on the qualitative themes present in the client’s situation, and to think through together the possible trajectories of outcome that any action might precipitate. This is not to suggest that the coach or client should seek to predict with any degree of certainty, what might unfold. Rather, the task is to hold those multiple possibilities in mind and take action that maximises the ability to respond flexibly as outcomes emerge.” (Law, 2013, p. 18)

1.2 What is coaching psychology?

“But what do coaching psychologists bring to the burgeoning field of coaching? We bring more than just a framework for a conversation with a client, such as the famous GROW model. We bring a host of psychological theories and models that underpin, and bring depth to, the coaching relationship. These include an understanding of mental health; motivation; systems theory; personal and organisational growth; adaptation of therapeutic models to the field of coaching; research into effectiveness, resilience and positive psychology.” (Palmer & Cavanagh, 2006, p. 1)

“Although psychologists have long acted as coaches, coaching psychology has only recently emerged as an applied and academic sub-discipline.” (Grant, 2006, p. 12)

An overview of the research literature reveals that the definition of coaching psychology has evolved in accordance with the collaborative inputs within and amongst the various international professional bodies that represent psychologists – as driven by their respective coaching psychology special interest groups. These special interest groups include the British Psychological Society’s (BPS) SGCP, the Australian Psychological Society’s (APS) IGCP, as well as the Society of Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa’s (SIOPSA) Interest Group in Coaching and Consulting Psychology (IGCCP).

1.3 Definitions of coaching

“Building awareness and responsibility is the essence of good coaching.” (Whitmore, 2009, p. 33)

Coaching is: “a Socratic based dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (client) where the majority of interventions used by the facilitator are open questions which are aimed at stimulating the self-awareness and personal responsibility of the participant.” (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011, p. 74)

The Association for Coaching’s (AC) definitions for coaching, per the following domains (AC, 2012, p. 1):

- “Personal/Life: ‘A collaborative, solution-focused, results-orientated and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of work performance, life experience, self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee.’

- Executive: ‘personal coaching [...] is specifically focused at senior management level, where there is an expectation for the coach to feel as comfortable exploring business-related topics, as personal development topics with the client in order to improve their personal performance.’
- Corporate/Business: ‘the specific remit of a corporate coach is to focus on supporting an employee, either as an individual, as part of a team and/or organization to achieve [sic] improved business performance and operational effectiveness.’
- Specialty/niche: ‘the coach is expert in addressing one particular aspect of a person’s life e.g. stress, career, or the coach is focused on enhancing a particular section of the population e.g. doctors, youths.’
- Group: ‘the coach is working with a number of individuals either to achieve a common goal within the group or create an environment where individuals can co-coach each other.’”

Stelter (2012) proposes the following definition of coaching:

“Coaching is described as a developmental conversation and dialogue, a co-creative process between coach and coachee with the purpose of giving (especially) the coachee a space and an opportunity for immersing him/herself in reflection on and new understandings of 1) his or her own experiences in the specific context and 2) his or her interactions, relations and negotiations with others in specific contexts and situations. This coaching conversation should enable new possible ways of acting in the contexts that are the topic of the conversation.” (Stelter, 2012, p. 8)

1.4 The evolution of coaching psychology definitions:

As research into coaching psychology continues, the following collaboratively penned coaching psychology definitions provide a foundational framework and continue to be a work in progress.

British Psychological Society (BPS) Special Group in Coaching Psychology (SGCP):

- “Coaching psychology is for enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and work domains underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established adult learning or psychological approaches.” (Grant & Palmer, 2002)

Australian Psychological Society (APS), Interest group in Coaching Psychology (IGCP):

- “Coaching psychology can be understood as being the systematic application of behavioural science to the enhancement of life experience, work performance, and well-being for individuals, groups and organisations who do not have clinically significant mental health issues or abnormal levels of distress.” (Grant, 2006, p. 16)

SIOPSA’s IGCCP definition:

- “Coaching psychology, as practiced by a ‘coaching’ psychologist is a conversational process of facilitating positive development and change towards optimal functioning, well-being and increased performance within work and personal life domains, in the absence of clinically significant mental health issues, and through the application of a wide range of psychological theories and principles. The intervention is action orientated with measurable outcomes, but also reflective towards creating greater self-

awareness and meaning and directed at individuals, groups, organisations and communities within a culturally specific context.” (Odendaal & Le Roux, 2016, p. 18)

In contrast to focusing on psychological approaches, Passmore (2010) (in Passmore, Stopforth & Lai, 2018) proposes that coaching psychology become its own domain of study, as is occupational/organisational, health, or forensic psychology.

He defines coaching psychology as “the scientific study of behaviour, cognitive and emotion within coaching practice to deepen our understanding and enhance our practice within coaching.” (Passmore & Theeboom, 2016, p. 30)

He also states, “while there are few observable differences between coaching and coaching psychology, the study of psychology can enhance practice, and may lead to materially different outcomes.” (Passmore, Stopforth, & Lai, 2018)

1.5 Other definitions of coaching psychology:

- “Coaching psychology is for enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and work domains, being underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established psychological approaches.” (Law, 2013, p. 60)
- “While there remains some discussion about these issues, the trend in coaching psychology research has moved away from definitions towards areas of practice and impact.” (Passmore & Theeboom, 2016, p. 30)

1.6 Why is coaching psychology important?

Coaching is a response to an unmet need in an individual who lives in a volatile, ever-changing world with great complexity. Coaching psychology provides a non-proprietary, evidence-based, evolving wellness model that is collaborative, client-driven, and adaptable. A primary need in people is to have a sense of well-being and personal meaning in this world (Passmore & Theeboom, 2016).

1.7 When is coaching psychology necessary?

Coaching psychology is necessary when...

- A scientist-practitioner, evidence-based, case formulation is required for a coaching client. “Formulation can be understood as an explanatory account of the issues with which a client is presenting (including predisposing, precipitating and maintaining factors) that can form the basis of a shared framework of understanding and which has implications for change... this explanatory account will draw upon a wide range of data including psychological theory, general scientific principles, research from the wider literature and professional experience, in addition to being informed by the nuances of the client’s self-told story.” (Lane & Corrie, 2009, p. 196)
- When working in complex systems across the organisation.
- When long-term, sustainable cognitive, behavioural, and emotional change is required.
- When a psychological developmental approach is required (e.g., when working toward developing an individual’s awareness and ego-integration).
- When evidence-based tools (albeit reductionist) that are grounded in psychology are incorporated into the coaching relationship.

1.8 Some thoughts on the focus of the coaching psychology debate and future developments

1. *Coaching Models*: Incorporating coaching models that inform practice: For example, Systems Thinking (model), and Narrative Coaching (approach) (Law, 2013), amongst others.
2. *Professionalism*: Drake (2008) introduces the term ‘post-professional’ – “Looking from the psychodynamic perspective, Drake (2008) regarded the role of coaches as one designed to provide ‘holding environments’ – a ‘container’ or ‘eco-system’ that holds the coachee’s anxiety; thereby both the coach and the coachee can create more adaptive responses in complex and chaotic environments.”
3. *Evidence-based practice*: Coaching psychologists will need to develop the following elements, in order to respond to current challenges (Law, 2013, p. 19):
 - “a new interdisciplinary (‘a new sort of psychology’) that embraces diversity and ‘cross-disciplinary engagement’;
 - research approaches that have rigour beyond the traditional methods;
 - training that enables coaching psychologists to be competent while working within the ambiguity and uncertainty of complex systems; and
 - a profession that can help us to work within the complex and chaotic contexts of today’s world.”

Evidence-based practice: “Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) is the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient [client] characteristics, culture, and preferences.” (www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/evidence-based-statement [retrieved 12 September 2019])

Note on terminology: the correct term would be a ‘psychologist who coaches’ or Coaching Practitioner. There is currently no HPCSA registration category for ‘coaching psychologist’, so the term is legislatively incorrect. However, for ease of reference, the term ‘coaching psychologist’ is used.



2. MYTHS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF DISPELLING THEM

2.1 What do we mean by a myth in psychology?

Myths could be perceived as the public's, or a professional community's, commonly held and mistaken beliefs about facts in psychology (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Ruscio, & Beyerstein, 2010). There are three characteristics that these mistaken beliefs share, namely that they are stable, go against established scientific evidence, and are strongly influenced by how people make sense of the world (Hammer, 1996). For the purposes of this working paper, we will refer to myths as mistaken beliefs that outright contradict evidence based on psychological research (Lilienfeld et al., 2010). In accordance with Lilienfeld et al.'s (2010) conceptualisation, we will interchangeably use the term 'psychomythology' to refer to myths in psychology in this working paper. Before we provide further reasons for why myths should be dispelled, we would like to provide you with a little toolbox to help you spot myths in the wild. With the wild, we mean myths as they occur in everyday practice, not just myths that are clearly ring-fenced by academics. You can do this by employing the acronym – **FRESH BS**. A breakdown of the acronym will be provided below.

F (Fake news): The media might often portray information as far more sensational than it truly is. For example, Pinker (2018) outlined that the media often paints a far bleaker picture of the current state of human society than what the evidence would suggest. On many indices, such as education and health, the evidence suggests that human society is progressing in the right direction (Pinker, 2018).

R (Representativeness): Be careful when people forward arguments that artificially attribute things to each other based on their seeming resemblance (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). For example, the belief that a human figure drawing with large eyes might resemble somebody who is paranoid might seem plausible, even though there is little scientific evidence to support this claim (Lilienfeld et al., 2010).

E (Exaggerations): Not all myths are entirely false. For example, women and men do tend to differ with respect to some personality traits and career interests (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001; Lippa, 2010). However, it might be unwarranted to exaggerate this finding by stating that women are from Venus and that men are from Mars (Gray, 1992).

S (Selective perception): All humans, even registered psychologists, have a tendency to filter the world through a particular lens and, as a result, do not always perceive reality as it truly is (Lilienfeld et al., 2010). In this respect, human's lenses might be tainted by factors such as the availability heuristic. The availability heuristic suggests that people rely on information stored in their memory in order to make sense of new occurrences (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). For example, a recent report about a mass shooting performed by a schizophrenic patient might falsely lead people to conclude that this mental disorder is associated with violence, which is not a scientifically valid claim.

H (Heresy): False beliefs can easily be spread through word-of-mouth. It is important to note that, just because something is said time and again, does not necessarily make it true (Lilienfeld et al., 2010). For example, the phrase that 'opposites attract' has very little scientific merit to back it. To the contrary, similarities in terms of personality traits make for more happier marriages (Lazarus, 2001).

B (Biased sample): We often revel at the most recent discoveries in non-scientific articles or claims made by seasoned professionals, but we do little to investigate the sample on which their conclusions are based. It might be that these revolutionary discoveries were based on a very specific sample that cannot really be generalised to the majority of people. A clinician might state that, based on his/her years of experience with smokers, smoking addiction is very difficult to stop. However, the psychologist might only be exposed to a very small number of people that are typically desperate to stop smoke.

S (*Simple answers*): When something seems too good to be true, it probable is. The temptation is always there to provide an oversimplification for a complex problem. It might be posed as a cutting edge solution that will revolutionize psychology, such as speed reading, but may have little evidence to back it (Lilienfeld et al., 2010).

The intention of this working paper is not only to arm professionals with the required knowledge to identify myths in coaching psychology but also to empower professionals with the necessary skills to think critically about discoveries and conventions in psychology (maybe even what is shared in this working paper).

2.2 Why is it important to dispel myths?

In accordance with Van Vuuren's (2010) model of ethics, we believe that it is important to dispel myths due to the potential harm that it has for the self (people professionals) and others (clients receiving professional services). A visual adaptation of the proposed model is provided in Figure 1.

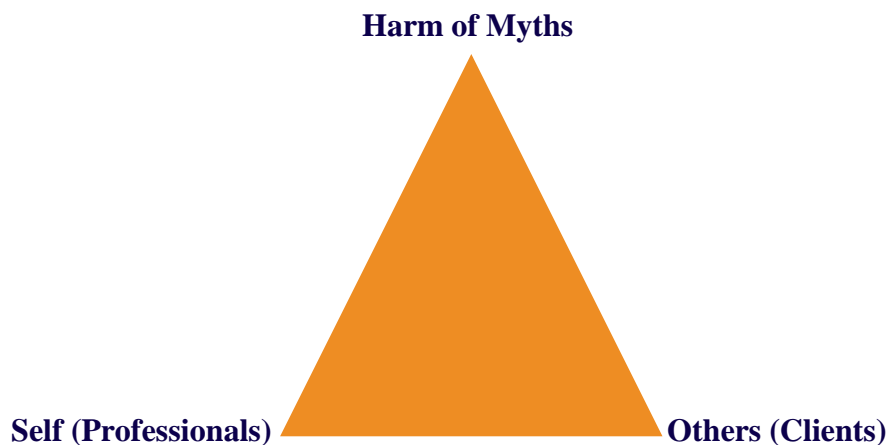


Figure 1. Defining ethics. Adapted from “Industrial psychology: Goodness of fit. Fit for goodness” by L.J. Van Vuuren (2010), *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 36, p. 7.

The harm of myths for the self (professionals): An important part of being a professional is the ability help solving problems by providing decision-makers with an independent, objective, and evidence-based opinion about matters surrounding psychology in the workplace (Lilienfeld et al., 2010; Van Vuuren, 2010). The credibility of psychological professionals, including the

longevity of the profession, could be severely damaged if mistaken beliefs about psychology are perpetuated (Lilienfeld et al., 2010; Van Vuuren, 2010).

The harm of myths for others (clients): Given the gravity attached to professional's advice, clients might make significant investments in terms of time and money, which might be completely wasted if based on false information (Lilienfeld et al., 2010; Van Vuuren, 2010). In addition, false information might, directly and indirectly, do more damage to the psychological wellbeing of a client than when a client received no advice (Lilienfeld et al., 2010; Van Vuuren, 2010).

2.3 A myth's lifecycle and coaching psychology's vulnerability

As per Furnham's (2004) contention about myths in management, we believe that coaching psychology falls prey to myths through a sequential process with seven stages, which is outlined in Figure 2.

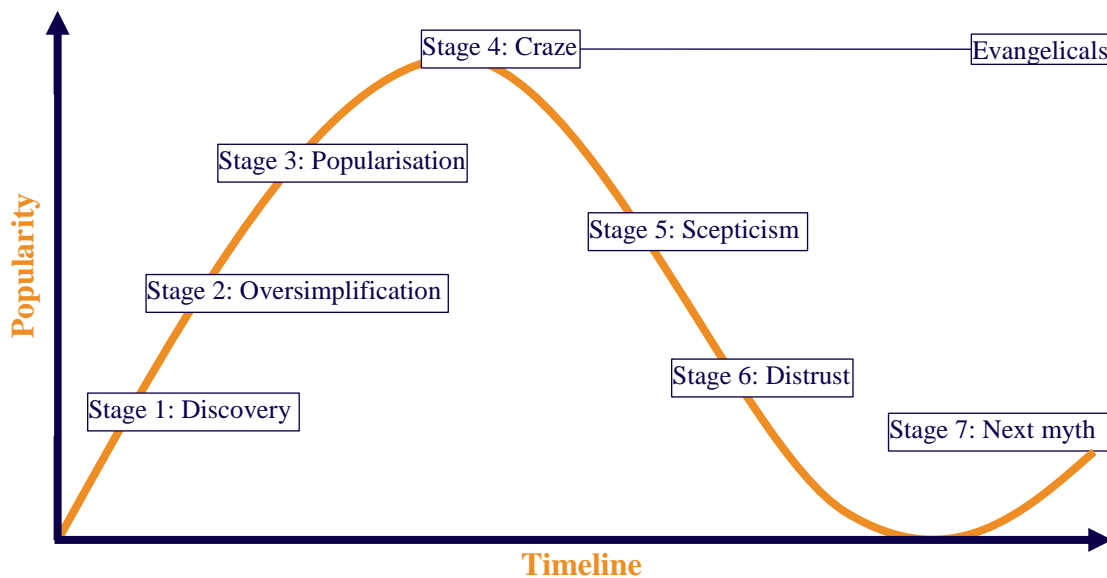


Figure 2. Timeline of myths. Based on “Management and myths: Challenging business fads, fallacies and fashions.” by A. Furnham (2004), p. 3.

Stage 1 – Discovery: A myth might have its origins in an initial discovery at an academic institution (Furnham, 2004).

Stage 2 – Oversimplification: Somebody might read the paper and provide an oversimplification of its findings to others. Due to people's selective memory, they might only choose to perpetuate one specific thing about the article, and through repetition, this one piece of information might take hold as fact, irrespective of the context in which it was said (Furnham, 2004).

Stage 3 – Popularisation: A charismatic individual might come across the oversimplification of a complex issue and, given its appealing nature as a simple answer, popularise it among psychological professionals and laypeople alike (Furnham, 2004).

Stage 4 – Craze: As excitement about the idea spreads, it is widely adopted as a state-of-the-art practice in a particular discipline (Furnham, 2004).

Stage 5 – Scepticism: Some scholars are willing to stick their necks out in order to counter the emerging myth. However, practitioners might initially be defensive about the counter findings (Furnham, 2004).

Stage 6 – Distrust: The media gets hold of a myth and publicly denounce the finding. A complete distrust of a particular finding, perhaps even its related scope of practice, might develop as a result of the misleading idea. Even though a thorough understanding of the original claim in all its complexity might have yielded some interesting insights, the idea is now completely abandoned (Furnham, 2004).

Stage 7 – Next myth: As practitioners' distrust of a myth eventually increases, due to lacking evidence, charismatic individuals might start to gravitate to another myth to popularise (Furnham, 2004). Some psychologists and laypeople might be so swayed by a myth that they remain evangelical followers of a myth, irrespective of the compounding evidence against it, which can cause serious reputational damage to the professional's career. It accentuates the importance of psychological professionals being able to immunize themselves against myths by adopting the necessary critical skills.

No one is immune to myths. With any new areas of interest that professionals embark on, they often run the risk over-inflate their understanding of it. According to Kruger and Dunning (1999), people who learn something new might lack a metacognitive understanding (the ability to know how little you know) in order to make an accurate judgement of a new thing that they are learning. We believe that coaching psychology might be particularly vulnerable due to myths, and the associated new discoveries, for the below reasons (Spence & Oades, 2011).

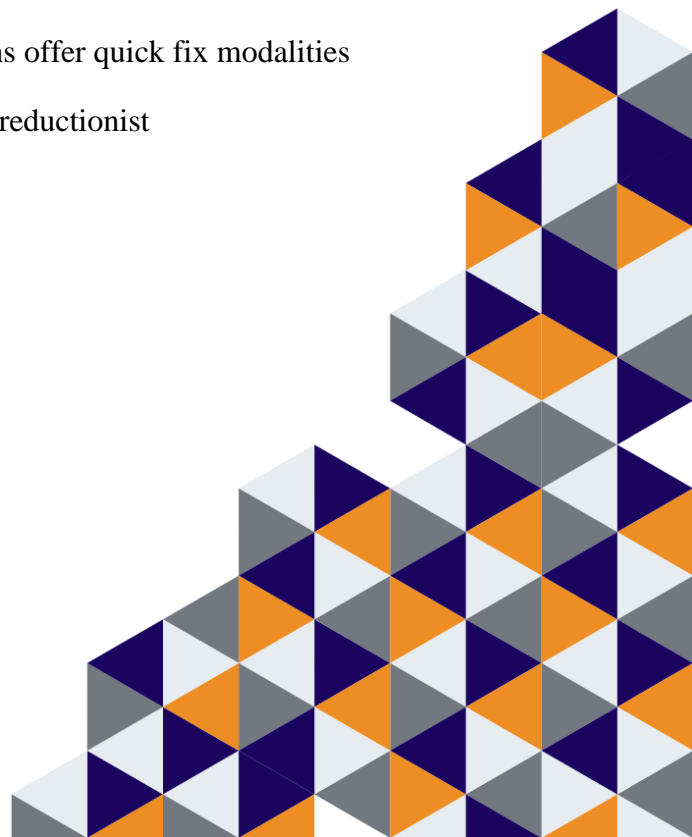
Reason 1. Small research samples

Reason 2. Lack of experimental research

Reason 3. Emerging nature of the discipline

Reason 4. Mainstream contemporary coaching solutions offer quick fix modalities

Reason 5. Evidenced-based approaches can be seen as reductionist



3. FIVE MYTHS IN COACHING PSYCHOLOGY

3.1 Myth 1: SMART goals are always sensible

Goals are at the heart of coaching. Humans and other mammals require an instinctual drive to help them satisfy their needs in life (Locke & Latham, 2013). One of these mechanisms are goals, which could be seen as the aim of a particular action or the desired result that must be achieved (Locke & Latham, 2002). Humans have the added advantage of the metacognitive ability to think about the differences between a current and future state in their lives or work, which motivate them to satisfy long-term strategic needs (Locke & Latham, 2013).

Given the importance of goal setting and goal attainment to human survival, it has received considerable attention in industrial and organisational psychology, which has crystallised into a succinct and empirically supported model that outline the relationship between goal setting and performance, namely the High-Performance Cycle (Borgogni & Dello Russo, 2013; Latham, Locke, & Fassina, 2002). A core predictor of high-performance at work includes the degree to which goals set are specific and challenging (Borgogni & Dello Russo, 2013; Latham et al., 2002). Important moderating factors of the relationship between challenging goals and high-performance includes ability, self-efficacy, goal commitment, feedback, task complexity, and organisational constraints (Borgogni & Dello Russo, 2013). Mediating factors on the relationship between challenging goals and high-performance include the direction, effort, and persistence of motivation to achieve goals (Borgogni & Dello Russo, 2013).

Goal setting is central to the self-regulation process, which reflects the degree to which individuals can control their impulses in order to achieve long-term satisfaction (Day & Unsworth, 2013). Coachees can attain long-term life and work satisfaction by setting goals, developing action plans, initiating action, monitoring performance, evaluating performance, and adjusting actions to better achieve goals (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Grant, 2003). According to Grant (2012), it is the coaching psychologist's role to facilitate movement through the goal-setting process. The goal-setting process, therefore, provides a framework through which coaching psychologists can place coachees at the helm of their own personal development (Grant, 2012; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). Even though simplified models, such as the SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-framed) acronym, might assist coaching psychologists to help coachees to set and pursue goals, an oversimplified application of the model can have unintended negative consequences (Grant, 2012).

3.1.1 What logic and evidence suggest that this is a misleading assumption?

Challenging and specific goals are often linked to high-performance (Locke & Latham, 2013). However, there might be unintended negative consequences of blindly applying the SMART model with clients. Latham and Locke (2006) outline the following ten potential pitfalls of setting high-performance goals (sometimes associated with SMART goals), namely:

1. neglecting learning goals, essential for the knowledge and skills required to achieve high-performance goals,
2. creating unhealthy competition among employees instead of collaboration,
3. creating the perception that high-performance goals are threatening instead of challenging,
4. enhancing unwarranted risk-taking if the non-attainment of high-performance goals is punished,

5. creating an overreliance on knowledge from past success on high-performance goals instead of considering the novel aspects of new goals,
6. creating inappropriate goal-reward linkages, where ordinary goals are portrayed as more difficult by employees in order to get bigger bonuses,
7. linking high-performance goals to self-esteem, where people might act defensively if their goals are threatened by others,
8. ignoring non-goal performance areas,
9. increasing stress, and
10. achieving high-performance goals might lead to impossible goals being set in subsequent years.

It is therefore evident that setting high-performance goals, through cues provided by the SMART acronym, might lead coaching psychologists to neglect the deeper underpinnings of goal setting processes during coaching, which could have unintended negative consequences.

Coaching has also moved beyond setting SMART goals. The concept of “third-generation coaching” can be described as a collaborative journey where the coach and coachee generate meaning together in the conversation (Stelter, 2009, 2014). The goal is to achieve (1) a strengthening sense of coherence in the coachee’s self-identity; and (2) integrating past, present and future into a whole (Stelter, 2009, 2014). This is contrasted with first-generation coaching, where the goal is to help the coachee reach a specific objective, and to second-generation coaching, where the coach would make the assumption that the client would know the solutions and answers to their challenges (Stelter, 2009, 2014).

3.1.2 What are the ethical dangers of preserving this false belief?

According to Welsh and Ordóñez (2014), setting consecutive high-performance goals that constantly require self-control might deplete the client’s energy required to attain goals due to stress and fatigue. As a result, clients might start to search for shortcuts to achieve their goals, which might indirectly lead to unethical behaviour (Schweitzer, Ordoñez, & Douma, 2004; Welsh & Ordóñez, 2014). An overzealous focus on SMART goals, without considering the nuances of the client’s needs, may lead to counterproductive work behaviours that can harm the coachee, the coachee’s organisation, and the coaching psychologist’s reputation.

3.1.2 What should a practitioner do given their knowledge of this myth?

Grant (2012) provides a useful integrative model of coach-facilitated goal attainment (as outlined in Addendum B) that can assist coaching psychologists to develop a more nuanced understanding of the self-regulation process during goal setting. In the model, Grant (2012) outlines several factors that should be taken into consideration throughout the goal attainment process, such as:

1. the impact of individual and contextual factors on the coachee’s need for coaching,
2. characteristics of both the coach and coachee that influences the selection of goals,
3. the type of goals and action plans required (approaching vs. avoidance goals, distal vs. proximal goals, performance vs. learning goals, alignment between goals),
4. as well as the impact of mediators (effort, persistence, and task strategies) and moderators (feedback, commitment, ability, and task complexity) on goal attainment.

It is essential that coaching psychologists expand their understanding of goal-setting within the self-regulation process. A cornerstone of self-regulation is that the coachee should remain in

3.2 Myth 2: Coaching is about the future vs. therapy being about the past

This myth raises the question of the distinction between coaching and therapy, a future versus a past focus, and the unconscious (possibly presumed to be in the past) and conscious (presumed to be a present awareness with a future link). Due to the nature of this paper, coaching psychology as an offering will be included in the discussion of this myth.

The assumed dichotomy in the myth is in itself misleading. There are therefore a few perspectives that might be useful in reviewing what this myth is about.

A starting point could be distinguishing between the offerings of coaching and coaching psychology – this discussion is of ethical practice as well as one of boundaries of competence. This boundary is not easily drawn but is necessary and is critical to identify. Yet, in the “...dichotomous world of our minds...” (Cavanagh & Grant, 2004, p.1), we tend to get caught in absolutes and mutually exclusive distinctions. As we tend to compartmentalise our worlds, we could think of our lives in terms of discrete roles and dimensions.

We might compartmentalise the past and future in the same way. The reality is that the distinction between future and past is not a line boundary, rather it can be seen as a range or progression made up of points of integration and development. The client’s past can be a part of the unconscious; the unconscious past as opposed to a conscious past. Exploring a client’s past can include surfacing memories and emerging events, interpretations, associations which have been integrated unconsciously into the current state of being. The client is likely unaware of these drives or motives of behaviours or ways of being (Hunter, 2016), and how they came into being. The past therefore, is very much in the present. In order to understand the client, the experience of past and future should not be seen as separate states or experiences. Practitioners are required to work with the client with both in an integrated way. This process of integration could be expressed by the symbol of the serpent circling back on itself; the Ouroboros the perpetual cycle of birth and death; renewal; the cycle of life; the infinity. (Reemes, 2015). The image of the uroboros (Jung, 1970), describes a circulatory process, a symbol of integration and assimilation; a ‘feed-back’ process across two points.

3.2.1 What logic and evidence suggest that this is a misleading assumption?

In order to understand these distinctions and to interrogate these boundaries a little more carefully, the following ideas are investigated.

A. Role vs. practice

A starting point could be distinguishing between the practice of coaching and the practice of therapy versus the role of coach and psychologist or psychotherapist. For example, a psychotherapist might practice as a coach, and aspects of the psychotherapy could include elements of coaching. This implies that at times, the training in these roles, could include related but inclusive areas of practice (Bachkirova, 2008). However, coaching is also a psychological endeavour (Bunning, 2006; Turner, 2010), even though coaching and psychotherapy draw on independent knowledge bases (Turner, 2010).

B. The differing depth of training and experience

A therapeutic intervention for distressed or psychologically dysfunctional clients might focus on deep-seated issues relating to anxieties, fears or defences. A coaching intervention might

focus on this area of the client's life as well, however, this would be, by definition, less comprehensive. The psychological practitioner would have had more robust theoretical training and practical understanding of the development and impact of such anxieties or defences on personality and subsequent behaviour, more so than the non-psychologist coach practitioner. "...most coaches are not trained to identify and address the impact of the person's inner process on their professional and personal lives" (Cavanagh & Grant, 2004 p2). However, the coach does need a critical and coherent level of articulated theoretical insight, as well as practical experience to inform their ability to guide their client in a developmental process.

More skill is required to work with the unconscious (with issues of the past and repressed issues), more knowledge of personality structure, related behaviours, motives and drives, and thus requires further in-depth training. A practitioner cannot always be sure as to what might emerge in a therapeutic process. Clients need guidance, structure and deep insight into managing emerging unexpected unconscious issues, and the integration and re-integration of these into the current state. Emerging issues could threaten identity, core self-concepts, and impact personality structure. Herein lies the value of in-depth training. Training that would allow the practitioner to have more psychological and physiological knowledge, to pre-empt and recognise warning signs of emerging issues (Price, 2009).

3.2.2 What are the ethical dangers of preserving this false belief?

When the dichotomous thinking of this myth is taken to be true, the ethical issues that emerge could include the following:

1. The coaching practitioner does not train themselves in recognising the impact of past factors in a client's life, team or an organisational process. "...untrained individuals practicing coaching is one of the proposed future obstacles of the profession" (Sime & Jacob, 2018).
2. The coaching practitioner ignores warning signs of emergent issues that could be destructive to the individual, team or organisation indicates that executive coaches who do not have rigorous psychological training can do more harm than good (Berglas, 2002).
3. On the other hand, the coaching psychologist could spend too much time exploring past issues and might miss the energy of the client to be forward focused.
4. The client might not have the emotional capacity or current interest to explore past events, and might only want to work on behavioural change. An insistence of this, therapeutically, could be a disrespect to the client purpose and agenda and or the organisational contract. Zeleznik (2007) indicates that interpreting unconscious material in an organisational coaching context is ineffective, irrelevant if not harmful.
5. Coaching psychologists can be over-reliant on counselling or therapeutic approaches and do not train themselves in coaching techniques, especially as related to the business context, or positioning clear, direct forward action in a business context (Passmore, 2007).
6. The past/future is considered a dichotomy of one or the other, whereas both can be considered as playing out in the present moment.
7. There can be too great an emphasis on how past events impact present and, thus, future. Direct causal links can be inaccurate and disrespectful to assume.

3.2.3 What should a practitioner do given their knowledge of this myth?

A. Past and future – a decision of where the practitioner prefers and is competent to practice

Research from Turner (2010) indicates that many coaches consider it useful to explore past and informing events in order to understand current states and how to go about achieving goals in the future. The past provides a context for the present. Therefore, explorations into the past with a client is mostly necessary – whether one is offering coaching or a more psychological approach. However, the offering would focus to a greater or lesser depth in the past and predispositions of the client. If a practitioner is offering coaching for example, the focus might be more on a cognitive-behavioural approach, focused on setting up behaviour for goals or a future state.

A psychologist offering coaching might focus more on in-depth ego defences (for example) that undermine behaviour when envisioning a future state, if the need and contract is appropriate. If this is indeed the case, the view is that the psychodynamic or psychoanalytic approach would lead to longer-term and more sustainable learning and implementation of required changes and transformations. Ignoring the unconscious and deep phenomena can inhibit the development process of a client (and executive) at a great cost (De Vries, 2007). Research on single-loop and double-loop learning (the work of Argyris) and the insights from triple-loop learning (Romme & van Witteloostuijn, 1999) indicate that single-loop learning has a behavioural focus that is not sufficient for embedded long-term change. Change is initiated from double and triple loop learning (Cavanagh & Grant, 2004). However, client successes can still be achieved with relatively small behavioural changes as in single loop learning. Therefore, the focus for the practitioner is a decision on the parameters of the coaching offering, scope of competence, and of practice.

B. What makes best / better practice?

As practitioners, it is possible to get caught up in the mutually-exclusive thinking of this myth, and the possible subjectivity of what makes ‘better’ practice.

The ‘dark’ unconscious is not the only way: A perspective sometimes held is that the individual’s informing pasts are dark, disturbing and threatening. Ideas largely from Freud and the psychoanalytic paradigm propose that in order to reduce anxieties, individuals set up defence mechanisms such as projection or transference for example (Freud, 1923). These drives seek to defend against the anxiety. Whether the past or deeper drives and related anxieties are considered troubling or not, this is still only one paradigm of human behaviour. Hillman (1999) states that psychodynamics (and the psychoanalytic paradigm) is not the only approach by which we understand feelings, fantasies, and behaviours. Thus, a psychodynamic exploration has a place; however, not the only place.

Explorations of the past from other perspectives include those from epigenetics, described as “... the study of the complex interactions (or ‘constructions’ and ‘deconstructions’) underlying the development of an organism over its lifetime. Modern epigenetics was introduced by Conrad Waddington in 1942, defined as ‘the branch of biology which studies the causal interactions between genes and their products which bring the phenotype into being’” (Jablonka & Lamb, 2002).

Attachment theory of Bowlby and Ainsworth, although influenced to some extent by Sigmund Freud, as well as Melanie Klein, looks at the attachment relations, as well as the transmission of attachment relations between parent and child. Bowlby was more interested in studying the parents and understanding the interactional relations rather than the child (individual) in isolation (Bretherton, 1992).

The family constellations approach (Hellinger, Weber & Beaumont, 1998) and theories of family related conscience, belonging and loyalty as proposed by Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1984) indicate that an individual's past is systemically informed, is influenced by multiperson contexts, and requires a relational analysis in order to explore effectively.

Further, consider Jung's archetypal and collective unconscious, ideas which bring as much depth and human complexity to the surface as any psychoanalytic approach. Rogers' humanistic approach and client-centred therapy for example, emphasises authenticity, genuineness, empathy and unconditional positive regard (Turner, 2010), and does not include the approach of interpreting unconscious mechanisms. Furthermore, paradigms of thought such as Humanism, Existentialism, approaches from Jung and Perls present our deeper unconscious side as highly aspirational, positive, and driving toward completion, meaning, fulfilment and attainment of life purpose.

Thus, explorations of the 'past' as it is taking place in the present can be undertaken from various perspectives. Exploring the past, can be positively experienced, and does not necessarily require deep and difficult reflection.

C. Consider the coaching that is contracted with the client

The client's requirements, objectives and contract, would give some sight of what the client is ready for and what capacity they have to engage. Thus, the need of the client and contract of the organisation offers constraints to the offering (Bachkirova, 2008). If coaching psychology is required and contracted, then working deeply with the past and the unconscious in order to understand and 'unpack' the links between past and desired future actions or goals is a constructive approach.

At times, a coaching approach is required to be based on immediate and shorter-term thinking, and on future goal-focused coaching where the need and inclination is not for a longer-term development. Sometimes a cognitive-behavioural or similar approach is adequate to unlock effective thinking, build on existing coping skills in order to attain or achieve goals in the immediate term (Passmore, 2007).

This myth likely developed as coaching entered the field of opportunity and was required to clearly define and identify the scope of practice. This false dichotomy of past/future was likely a way to approach the business market indicating less of a reliance on psychology or therapy, and identifying ways of supporting clients to achieve, learn and grow without the necessity on delving too much into past. To some clients this (past) holds little interest and is not aligned to their current world view. As a way of approaching business, this approach can be very popular.

3.3 Myth 3: Coaching sticks with the conscious mind, therapists with the unconscious

The notion of a conscious and unconscious split in human behaviour is as much part of the professional field of psychology and associated disciplines as it is in the vocabulary of the man in the street. Players (practitioners and researchers, etc.) in the field of coaching and coaching psychology have been divided in their views as to whether coaching and coaching psychology should include, acknowledge, and incorporate this distinction in this practice field. Arguably, psychoanalytic and systems-psychodynamic approaches offer a ‘third alternative’ to management theory and organisational behaviour, respectively (Arnaud, 2012).

3.3.1 What logic and evidence suggest that this is a misleading assumption?

Although Sigmund Freud is credited with bringing the notion of the unconscious into psychiatry, psychology and even in the everyday language of laypeople, the roots of this notion can be traced back to philosophers as far back as Plato and Montaigne and Schelling also is mentioned as having a formative impact on Freud’s thinking (Hunter, 2016). The work of Freud (Freud, 1923), together with some of his students and contemporaries such as Carl Jung, Alfred Adler and Jacques Lacan, amongst others, form part of the depth-psychology stream that in essence all incorporate the notion of the unconscious in their thinking. A central theme in the ‘talking cure’ that these thinkers gave birth to was the idea that the unconscious should be made conscious and that mental health problems are primarily caused by unhealthy defence mechanisms, such as repression and sublimation, which lead to symptomatic problems, such as hysteria and psychopathology. Based on this early conceptualisation, psychoanalysis grew as one of the key theoretical modalities in the field of psychology and psychotherapy, although admittedly not without criticism and even total rejection by some (behaviour therapy, humanistic approaches such as proposed by Carl Rogers and others, cognitive therapies, systems-orientated therapies, and solution-focused approaches).

The obvious question that is still being intensely debated is whether what might hold true for the way we think about and treat mental problems in the field of psychotherapy could be generalised to the field of coaching, with the implicit view on personal growth and having a future focus. However, the fundamental question to be considered first is whether there is empirical evidence to support the notion of the unconscious and whether it exists. Only if such evidence exists would it be meaningful to debate the follow-up question, namely whether the unconscious should be part of coaching.

There is a compelling body of evidence emerging from the field of neuroscientific research that supports the notion of the unconscious and the role that it plays in human behaviour. After an extensive meta-analysis of research about the neural basis of the unconscious, Berlin (2012) compiled supportive evidence for the following relevant aspects: (1) subliminal perception, (2) affective and motivational unconscious processing, (3) unconscious emotional processing, (4) unconscious motivational processes and decision-making, (5) the neural basis of unconscious dynamic processes such as repression, suppression, dissociation, and (6) the neural basis for subconscious and conscious processes.

Even as early as 2008, Clark argued that as much as 80% of behaviour could be motivated by the unconscious based on an overview of neuroscientific data. After an extensive meta-analysis, Berlin (2012), came to conclusion that:

There have been significant advances from cognitive, neuroscientific, and social perspectives in the empirical study of unconscious mental processes (cognitive, emotional, and

motivational), and in understanding their structural and functional neural correlates. This research reveals a new vision of the mind and questions traditional concepts of the self, control of action, and free will. (p. 20)

Furthermore, Berlin (2012) stated:

New advances in neuroscience and technology are now enabling the neurobiology of the dynamic unconscious that Freud envisioned to come to fruition... in the process, a good deal of what Freud originally put forth based solely on clinical observations has been revised, refined, and enhanced. (p.21)

Finally, Berlin (2012) concludes that:

Devising novel ways, using modern technology, to empirically test dynamic unconscious processes such as repression, suppression, and dissociation will help unveil their neural basis and ultimately lead to more effective treatment options for psychiatric patients, completing the task that Freud began over a century ago. (p. 21)

Furthermore, Solms and Panksepp (2012) postulated, based on substantive neurological research, that the sub-brain provides the energy for higher forms of cognitive processes and therefore conclude that the classical psychoanalytical differentiation between the id and ego seems to be supported by modern neuroevolutionary data.

The role of the unconscious in the way biases operate is especially of interest for coaching psychology. The work that is done around the function that the unconscious plays in the formation of cognitive and perceptual biases that influence behaviour is relevant to the question of whether the notion has any relevance in everyday life, i.e., not to the field of psychopathology or a clinical setting, typically the context for psychoanalytical thinking. Empirical support for the role of the unconscious is the research in the field of how bias and specifically racial bias that function unconsciously influence behaviour and decision making with far-reaching social and even moral consequences. Some of our unconscious behaviour flows from conscious decisions, for example a motorist driving a manual car without being consciously aware of the process of changing gears and performing other automated behaviours. Bias, on the other hand, has a different logic; namely, that we are unaware of the emotions and motives that influence our behaviour. Racial, gender and sexual preference biases are very topical and the way that these play out in the workplace to work against diversity efforts constitutes an important field of study (Winkielman, 2010). Winkielman's (2010) line of analysis moves the discussion about the unconscious triggers of behaviours from the arena of normal functioning, or healthy individuals in general, into the centre of the organisational dynamics where coaching is most often practised.

Lastly, one of the most important quandaries in society is the moral blindness of seemingly well-functioning individuals, as well as those in leadership positions. It might seem illogical that someone with highly-espoused moral values, in line with society's definition of what constitutes moral behaviour, often acts immorally. De Klerk (2016) argues through a scientific and psychoanalytical perspective that one of the most plausible explanations for this phenomenon is the role that emotions play in decision-making and in turn the influence that the unconscious has on emotions.

3.3.2 What are the ethical dangers of preserving this false belief?

The following ethical dilemmas could arise if the vast supportive body of evidence for the impact of the unconscious on behaviour is not adequately factored into coaching approaches and models by coaching practitioners:

- 1 Lack of sustainability of interventions and coaching if all factors of human behaviour are not considered (Shedler, 2010).
- 2 A risk that unconscious factors (needs, drives, and emotions) could derail coaching efforts. Resistance to change and growth, self-defeating behaviour by destructive repetitive patterns informed by unconscious emotional drives, and the so-called immature defence mechanisms (Hunter, 2016).
- 3 Overlooking the effects that psychodynamic mechanisms such as projection, transference, and counter transference could have on executive leadership, business decisions, and coaching interactions. (Cilliers, Rothman & Struwig, 2004).
- 4 Risk of poor judgment and decision-making if unconscious factors are not surfaced in the consciousness of clients during coaching processes (De Klerk, 2016).

3.3.3 What should a practitioner do given their knowledge of this myth?

As highlighted by an investigation amongst coaches as to what theoretical models are used in practice, it is clear that many, if not all coaches, acknowledge the unconscious, while only some use it in their coaching (Turner, 2010). From the previously outlined thoughts, arguments, and evidence, it is clear that any helping professional, whether working with individuals and systems that could be described as ridden with pathology or working with a positive psychology approach, would limit their options to be of help by not taking note of the evidence that supports the impact of the unconscious on human behaviour.

There is a range of options for how a coach could employ the notion of the unconscious in coaching. These include making use of basic concepts such as helping individuals to understand their blind spots, as proposed in the Johari-window notion (Luft & Ingham, 1955), to enhancing mindfulness (increasing consciousness). A practitioner could also coach from a psycho-systems perspective with models such as the Organisational Role Analysis (ORA) or surfacing issues in the system with regard to the conflict, identify, boundary, authority, roles and tasks by means of the CIBART model. The ORA and CIBART approaches are in many ways similar, in that both attempt to surface what lies beneath. (Huffington, 2004). These approaches are central to the work from of the Tavistock School in the UK (Cilliers, Rothmann & Struwig, 2004; Hunter 2012). On the far end of the range a coach may use Lacan's psychoanalytical principles as a basis to coach an individual in an organisation (Vanheule & Arnaud, 2016).

The following are some elementary guidelines for coaches:

- Ensure that coaches are equipped with knowledge and insight about the unconscious factors impacting behaviour, through training and subscribing to training programs that recognise and deal with the unconscious (Turner, 2010).
- Since the coach's own personality and motives are often key elements in impacting their efficacy, self-knowledge and insight are crucial. Awareness of their own unconscious drivers and how these could affect the coach's life, in general and specifically in their capacity as coach, should be at the forefront of the coach's own development (Wheeler, 2015).

3.4 Myth 4: Coaching is only about building strengths and positive psychology

The practice of coaching psychology has been painted in a positive light with the primary purpose to support individuals to achieve their optimal functioning, well-being and increased performance in both their work and personal life, through the use of a range of psychological theories and principles (Odendaal & Le Roux, 2016). It is not surprising that the practice of coaching psychology is largely associated with the discipline of positive psychology as it focuses on utilizing an individual's key strengths in order to unlock their potential.

Positive psychology, a term coined by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), is the “scientific study of optimal functioning, focusing on aspects of the human condition that lead to human happiness, fulfillment and flourishing” (Linley & Harrington, 2005, p. 13). Both positive psychology and coaching psychology are explicitly concerned with the enhancement of individual well-being and performance, and consequently, coaching psychology is becoming increasingly understood from the positive psychological perspective (Kauffman & Scoular, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004). This natural partnership has resulted in the development of Positive Psychology Coaching (PPC), which can be defined as “evidence-based coaching practice informed by the theories and research of positive psychology for the enhancement of resilience, achievement, and wellbeing” (Green & Palmer, 2019, p. 10).

In recent years, positive psychology has received much criticism for its lack of scientific rigor and consequently, the sub discipline is being regarded by some as pseudoscience (Brown, Sokal & Friedman, 2013, 2014; Friedman & Brown, 2018). The most infamous is the debunking of the critical positivity ratio (Friedman & Brown, 2018). The critical positivity ratio was developed by Fredrickson and Losada (2005) and is a ratio of the number of positive to negative emotions. The findings indicated that the number 2.9013 was identified as the point that distinguishes between flourishing and languishing. However, the problem was found that the critical positivity ratio was mathematically misapplied and hence the claim is largely regarded as invalid (Brown et al., 2013). In addition to this, the claim is argued to be based on flawed reasoning, because it requires the comparison of emotions which intrinsically differ in magnitude and duration (Friedman & Brown, 2018).

3.4.1 What logic and evidence suggest that this is a misleading assumption?

This section will outline a critique of some aspects of overzealous claims in positive psychology, namely emotions, experiences, personality, and strengths. Please note that the terms ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions, as referred to below, are not intended (by the writers of this section) to be value-judgement labels (i.e., as being either good/bad, or more/less desirable). Instead, these terms are used in parallel with how each of the cited researchers has applied these labels in their respective academic articles.

1. *Emotions* - A critique of positive psychology is that it has ignored the reality and benefits of negative emotions (Wong & Roy, 2018). A popular theory in positive psychology is the broaden-and-build theory developed by Fredrickson (2001) and hypothesizes that positive emotions broaden peoples thought-action repertoires (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2000) and build their psychological resilience, resulting in enhanced emotional well-being (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). It, therefore, does not address the benefits of negative emotions. Negative emotional states have been found to contain an array of benefits of human thinking and behaviour (Forgas, 2013). Negative emotions have been found to improve memory performance, motivational

drive, reduce judgmental errors, and result in more effective interpersonal strategies (Forgas, 2013).

2. *Experiences* - Positive psychology interventions are based on the assumption that individuals should “replace negative experiences with positive ones” (Parks & Biswas-Diener, 2013, p. 160). Although positive experiences might somewhat alleviate the harmful effects of negative ones, there is no evidence suggesting that the negative effects of a traumatic experience can simply disappear as a result of positive interventions (Wong & Roy, 2018). Research has found that acknowledging and dealing with negative experiences enables an individual to gain understanding and mastery over other stressful and traumatic experiences (Larsen, Hemenover, Norris & Cacioppo, 2003), thereby enhancing their distress tolerance (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014).
3. *Personality* - Positive psychology has been criticised for failing to understand the dark side of human existence (Ivtzan Lomas, Hefferon & Worth, 2016). According to Nelson and Hogan (2009) personality predicts both leadership effectiveness and derailment, and consequently, dysfunctional personality traits can derail the career of a competent executive. Therefore, by assessing and recognising dysfunctional personality traits can act as preventative maintenance for the risk of derailment in the future (Nelson & Hogan, 2009). In addition to this, coaches who use scientifically-validated assessments of the ‘bright side’ as well as the ‘dark side’ of personality find that this accelerates the coaching process, improves the professional relationship between the coach and the client, and improves the client’s satisfaction with the coaching service (Hogan, 2007).
4. *Strengths* - Positive psychology utilises a strength-based approach and, therefore, typically focuses on an individual’s character strengths in order to enable for that individual to thrive (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Although it is crucial for individuals to know what their areas of strength are, it is equally as important for individuals to know what their areas of weakness are as this will result in greater self-awareness and self-insight. According to Chamorro-Premuzic (2016) research suggests that the best method for a coaching intervention considers an individual’s weaknesses. In addition to this, identifying and focusing on an individual’s character strengths is not sufficient, as, according to a study conducted by Freidlin, Littman-Ovadia and Niemiec (2017), individuals who underused and overused their character strengths were found to be more depressive than those individuals who optimally used their character strengths, suggesting that character strengths can have negative outcomes.

3.4.2 What are the ethical dangers of preserving this false belief?

The ethical implications of solely adopting a positive psychology-related approach to coaching include:

1. *Emotions* - The lack of focus on understanding negative emotions creates an impression that negative emotions are not beneficial for optimal human functioning, and thus negative emotions are ‘bad’, whereas positive emotions are ‘good’ (Norem & Chang, 2002). Furthermore, this might result in individuals feeling embarrassed, guilty, or ashamed when experiencing negative emotions. Consequently, instead of seeking the help to recognise, feel, and discuss these negative emotions, individuals will deliberately find ways to distract themselves, therefore, failing to understand the reasons and implications of their negative emotional state (Wegner, 1997).

3.5 Myth 5: Neuroscience provides the scientific foundation for coaching

To ensure a solid understanding of the various aspects of coaching psychology, it is vital that we base our studies on robust theoretical fundamentals. Neuroscience is best thought of as a paradigm or interpretive framework that sheds new light on existing problems. To this extent, the emerging fields of social cognitive-affective neuroscience (Ochsner & Lieberman, 2001), organisational neuroscience (Becker, Cropanzano, & Sanfey, 2011) and organisational cognitive neuroscience (Lee, Senior, & Butler, 2012) aim to apply neuroscientific methods to examining and understanding human behaviour. The latter two approaches focus on applied settings within organisations: the individual, the group, and organisational or even inter-organisational levels. The field of Neuropsychotherapy also claims to bring conceptual and practical value to the field of psychology (Grawe, 2007; Rossouw & Rossouw, 2017).

The question that arises is whether neuroscience provides the scientific foundation for coaching (and for coaching psychology)?

3.5.1 What logic and evidence suggest that this is a misleading assumption?

There is already scientific proof that coaching works irrespective of what neuroscience proponents may say (Grant, 2015). There are significant peer-reviewed data from the behavioural sciences indicating that coaching can help behavioural change (Palmer & Whybrow, 2018; Passmore, 2015). It is also evident that there is little empirical data that links neuroscience research to coaching outcomes (Cunningham, 2017; Boyatzis & Jack, 2018). It is a misconception that neuroscience provides ‘hard proof’ of explaining human behaviour via neuroscience technologies like fMRI imaging (Rock & Page, 2009). We now know that fMRI and qEEG technologies are only surface markers of underlying complex brain processes, which themselves are a response to a broad range of external stimuli and internal psychological and biological processes (Sapolsky, 2017). In essence, brain scanning has its limits, and we therefore should be sceptical of reductionist views that tend to be highly alluring misconceptions.

The challenge with applying neuroscience or brain data to human behaviour in an organisational context is that an oversimplification of the proclaimed neural underpinnings of behaviour can render the study of anything ‘neuro’ as a short-lived movement (Lindebaum & Zundel, 2013). The pitfalls of brain-based approaches are that some see it as being reductionist, research findings are often preliminary, there are a lack of replication studies, and research samples are typically too small to generalize findings (Grant, 2015).

Robert Sapolsky (2017) calls this the ‘Many buckets analogy’ – there is no ‘ONE’ model for understanding the brain and its link to behaviour. Instead, coaching psychologists should explore the concept of ‘levels of analysis’. This is referred to as “multiple levels of analysis” (Ochsner & Kosslyn, 2014, p. 2), in which the combination of both behavioural and brain data allows researchers to converge on theoretical explanations that are robust and malleable, and are not tied to a single explicit experimental methodology.

3.5.2 What are the ethical dangers of preserving this false belief?

The ethical dangers of preserving this false belief are that anecdotal theory on how the brain works are used in coaching, compromising the integrity of the process and often doing more harm than good. According to Van Ommen and Van Deventer (2016) “we find ourselves in the midst of a proliferation of neuro-centered disciplines, establishing what some call a

neuroculture” (p. 573). They warn against neo-liberal (i.e. new and faddish) approaches to studying human behaviour, as these approaches lack scientific rigour, replication studies, and are driven by populist anecdotal interpretations and broad generalisations.

This does not mean that we must refrain from engaging with the neurosciences. Di Domenico and Ryan (2017) argue for the importance of using neuroscience methods in studying human behavioural constructs for at least three interrelated reasons. Firstly, experience and behaviour are mediated by the brain. Secondly, neuroscience methods enable examination of internal processes that are not accessible by self-reports of experience or behavioural observations. Lastly, neuroscience technologies enables a level of sophistication and resolution rather than only experiential and behavioural methods.

3.5.3 What should a practitioner do given their knowledge of this myth?

- A good way to begin is to adopt a critical-realism philosophical and theoretical stance to the application of neuroscience within coaching psychology and other behavioural phenomena. Critical realism’s view of human behaviour is that it is embedded in a complex ecology of causal forces. It is thus seen as “realism without reductionism” (Healey & Hodgkinson, 2014, p. 771). This means that explanations of behaviour are complex, and both psychology and neuroscience play a role amidst many other contextual factors
- It is imperative that appropriate training and skills in organisational neuroscience are gained before deploying “brain-based” approaches.
- Mature bodies of neuroscience research enable making the science practical. At this stage, organisational neuroscience has some implications for coaching psychology – for example:
 - Social experiential factors shape the neural circuits essential to social and emotional behaviour from the prenatal period to the end of human life. These factors include both incidental influences, such as early adversity, and intentional influences that can be produced through specific interventions like mindfulness, talking therapies, coaching, and social inclusion – these influences promote prosocial behaviour and well-being (Adolphs, 2009; Kandel, Schwartz, & Jessell, 2013; Rossouw & Rossouw, 2017).
 - Enhance controllable incongruence: Incongruence forms the heart of life, survival, and thriving. It is the cornerstone of change. Controllable incongruence is facilitated when the coachee is confronted with encounters or triggers that are manageable and that resemble creative tension. In controllable incongruence, the cognitive brain is recruited and executive functions are activated resulting in effective self-reflection and problem-solving capabilities. Uncontrollable incongruence is facilitated when the coachee is confronted with challenges that activate the stress response (emotional tension), with diminished activation of the frontal neural systems (Grawe, 2007).
 - By the coach holding themselves and their coachee in a state of support and challenge, they are unlocking the key to neurogenesis – new neurons, pathways, habits, growth, and expansion (Grawe, 2007, Allison & Rossouw, 2013).
 - Build experienced-based Neuroplasticity: New habits or neural pathways are delicate, and relapse to default habits or pathways occurs easily (Klein & Jones, 2008). The challenge is to facilitate enough activation towards new

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This working paper is an attempt to debunk some of the myths surrounding coaching. We have undertaken a review of the scientific foundations either supporting or refuting such claims. We have also reviewed the historical and contextual factors that influence the formation and perpetuation of these and other myths. This discussion is made convoluted by contextual factors, and therefore these factors should also be woven into the debate about the myths surrounding coaching in general, and coaching psychology in particular.

In the first place, it is evident that coaching psychology as a profession is still in the incubator phase of development as a fully-fledged profession. Much of the seminal work done around coaching psychology, in particular, is focused on differentiating it from psychotherapy and counselling psychology, and also trying to untie it from the clinical context and the psychopathology roots of psychotherapies. Most of the myths explored in this paper can be directly traced back to these attempts. These attempts have also given birth to definitions of coaching psychology that mostly underscore the action and goal-directed approach in coaching, a focus on the future and less of the aetiology of behaviour, and, of course, the positive psychology movement that emphasises the potential of the individual to grow and achieve optimal functioning. Ironically, the same themes and endeavours are at the roots of differentiating counselling psychology from clinical psychology. The same themes that resonate through currently-proposed definitions for coaching can be founded in the attempts to define counselling in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Linked to the above, it is also clear that coaching and coaching psychology has, to some degree, an identity crisis and is at risk of becoming an extension of the political dynamic between the various sub-disciplines in psychology – with each of these staking their claim to as why coaching should be centred in their sub-branch. Industrial psychology claims that coaching is done mostly in an organisational setting, and therefore naturally belongs in this discipline. On the other hand, clinical and counselling psychology (therapists) claim that the vast body of scientific work accumulated over the last century on how behaviour develops and is changed is as valuable in clinical settings, the community, and organisations alike. To complicate things even more, professions such as educational psychology and social work are also operating, to some degree, in the field of coaching.

This murky and politically-loaded territory is, of course, the ideal breeding ground to give birth to and to propagate myths, especially when the strong commercialisation context in which coaching is often practised (especially business coaching) is taken into account. Coaching has become the new buzzword in our society, from having a sports coach to having a life coach. There are financial coaches, investment coaches, and, in organisations, we find team coaches, strategy coaches and, almost every day, a new type of coach.

And the loudest voice does not necessarily own the absolute truth – at the exclusion of the other voices.

There are at least two ways to look at this situation, namely, on the upside, it is clear that there is a demand for coaching in its many forms. Individuals, families, teams and organisation have embraced coaching as something that can help them cope with life's challenges and opportunities. In a way, coaching has de-stigmatised the act of giving help, a stigma that still exists to a degree for many of the older branches within the helping professions. However, the underbelly of this is the proliferation of coaching in its many forms, and a strong market demand that has developed is the growth in the number of players

that are not always as well trained and equipped at the task at hand, and don't fully understand the intricacies of what it entails to be of help. Short programmes and certifications in some model-based coaching should, however, not be discounted as it can be effective, but it should always be carefully and critically looked at by the professional community of psychology. Players outside of the academic tradition of registered psychologists are at the forefront of such platforms that are created for non-psychologists to practise coaching. Many of the myths explored in this paper can be linked back to an oversimplification and a less-than-optimal rigorous scientific approach to training, practising, and supervision.

To be of help to all and to share the depth of knowledge that coaching psychology can bring to the table, it is, of course, not a viable and effective, or even an ethically defensible, strategy to do a witch-hunt on non-psychologists that coach. The answers lie instead in beginning to speak with a more unified voice, and with more confidence about the value-add that psychology can bring to the coaching movement. We should encourage others to deepen their understanding of the full intricacies involved in human behaviour, and to work increasingly from a scientist-practitioner model themselves. We should lead the field and not, as it seems to be the case currently, try to play catch up. Psychology has much to offer, as proven in the analysis of these myths, and should be paving the way forward.

In summary, we propose the following:

- Always have a healthy dose of scepticism about oversimplifications to explain how human behaviour develops and is changed in all forms and settings, typically encapsulated in a simple pictorial model.
- Be wary of any model of coaching that is propriety in nature, and is therefore commercially, rather than always scientifically motivated.
- Focus on the value-add of the vast knowledgebase available within all branches of psychology and the other complementary professions and scientific fields (e.g., education, psychiatry, business sciences, neurosciences, sociology, and anthropology, to name a few).
- A scientist-practitioner approach is one of the best ways for coaching psychologists to stay abreast of the development in the relevant skills and competences, as well as to be ethical in their endeavours to be of help.
- To date, the emphasis on coaching has, perhaps, been focused too narrowly on the epistemological aspect or the 'how-to' of coaching. However, the ontological perspective – that is, the metacognitive notion of 'being a coach' – requires further attention.

Lastly, it is perhaps time to redefine coaching psychology – not as the anti-thesis for psychotherapy or by over-emphasising its enmeshment with any particular school of thought within psychology – but as a definition that is more inclusive, holistic, market-relevant of endeavour to be of help that in essence fully appreciates the nuances and complexities of the human condition and are working together to find sustainable answers for making a better life possible for all our clients.

Coaching psychology provides a wellness model that is collaborative, client-driven, and adaptable. A primary need in people is to have a sense of well-being and personal meaning in this world.

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ADDENDUM A

Use the statements in Table 1 to reflect on your community of professionals' adoption of an evidence-based approach to practice.

Table 1

Key characteristics of evidence-based practice in industrial psychology

1. Do your community of practitioners know what is meant by evidence-based practice?
2. Do your community of practitioners access the latest research findings and summaries?
3. Do your community of practitioners' continuously review primary and traditional literature?
4. Are fashionably new ideas treated by your community of practitioners with healthy scepticism?
5. Is there a demand from your clients and customers for evidence-based practices?
6. Are decisions made by professionals in your community based on the four sources of information, namely practitioner expertise and judgement, critical evaluation of best available research evidence, evidence from the local context, and perspectives of those who may be affected by decisions made?
7. Does your professional community embrace an evidence-based approach in training and continuing professional development (CPD) exercises?

*Obtained from "Evidence-based I–O psychology: Not there yet" by R. B. Briner and N. M. Rousseau (2011), *Industrial and Organisational Psychology*, 4, p. 9.*

ADDENDUM B

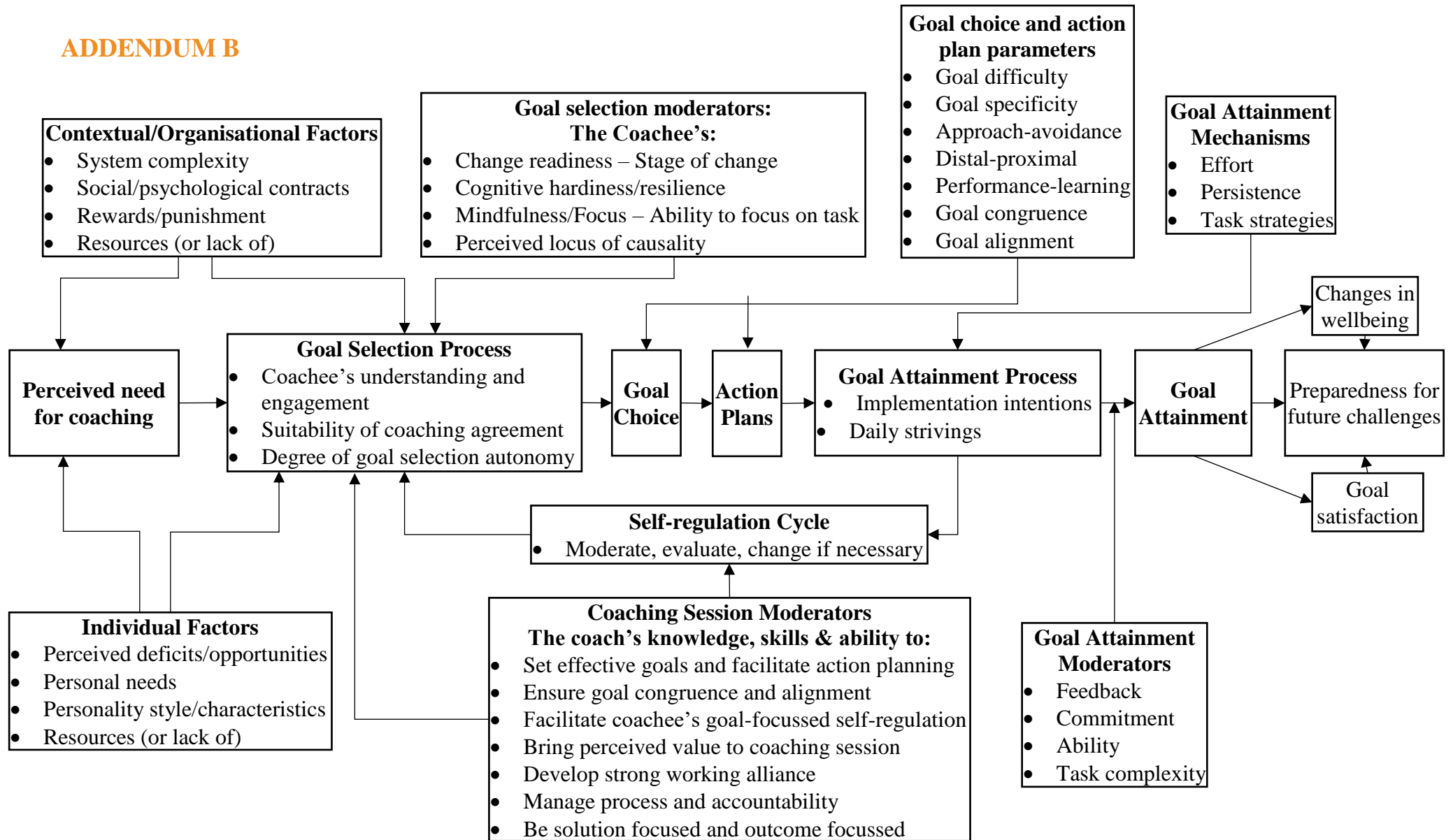


Figure 3. Integrative model of coach-facilitated goal attainment. Adapted from “An integrated model of goal-focused coaching: An evidence-based framework for teaching and practice” by A.M. Grant (2012), *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 7(2), p. 157.