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The effectiveness of positive psychological coaching at work: a systematic review

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to provide a thorough review of empirical research on the antecedents, outcomes, and underlying mechanisms that contribute to the effectiveness of positive psychological coaching at work. A systematic review of the literature utilising specific keywords, gathered from four bibliographic databases, yielded 505 records. All the records went through a screening process that included examining the titles, abstracts, and specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of fifteen publications on positive psychological coaching were incorporated into the study. These consisted of fourteen peer-reviewed journal papers and one doctoral dissertation. Our findings confirm that positive psychological coaching benefits both individuals and organisations by boosting well-being and work-related outcomes. Success factors and underlying mechanisms that determine intervention success were also highlighted. While this evaluation did identify some encouraging outcomes, it also revealed a dearth of rigorous methodology in addressing the aforementioned study variables, and a need for further research. We conclude by outlining strengths, limitations, and a future direction to expand this field's theoretical and empirical knowledge. Practitioners can benefit from this research to improve their performance in the coaching process by considering the key success factors in the delivery of a high-quality service to their clients.

Coaching in the work context is being used more and more often as a tool to develop personal capabilities, facilitate goal attainment, and optimise psychosocial well-being (Grant & Atad, 2022). Workplace coaching is a well-established practice in human resource development (Bozer & Delegach, 2019), and becoming one of the fastest-growing industries and professions on a global scale (ICF, 2020). Numerous controlled trials (e.g., Corbu et al., 2021; de Haan, 2019; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; Peláez et al., 2020; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020) and meta-analyses (e.g., Jones et al., 2016; Theeboom et al., 2014) have yielded substantial evidence for its effectiveness. In this study, we define workplace coaching as a learning and development intervention that utilises a collaborative

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relationship in an effort to attain work-related outcomes that are valued by the employee (Bozer & Jones, 2018). This can be achieved by fostering a collaborative, introspective, and goal-oriented relationship (Smither, 2011) with a particular focus on unlocking employees' potential and strengths (Passmore & Lai, 2019). Bozer and Jones (2018) proposed a broad concept that involves coaching provided to all levels of employees by external or internal coaching professionals not having managerial responsibility over the employee participant or coachee.

Previous research has demonstrated that emphasising personal strengths in the workplace allows employees to achieve their goals more effectively and perform better (Dubreuil et al., 2014). A strength can be defined as the ability of individuals to behave, think, and feel in an authentic and energetic way, since it allows them to function, develop, and grow to their full potential (Linley, 2008; Linley & Harrington, 2006). The strengths-based approach is one of the main pillars of Positive Psychology, as it stands on the humanistic premise that people are essentially healthy, capable and in desire to pursue meaningful and satisfying lives (Positive Psychology Center, 2016). In the organisational field, Positive Psychology aims to study the subjective experiences of employees to improve organisational effectiveness and quality of life by focusing on their positive qualities and strengths and allowing them to achieve their full potential (Donaldson et al., 2019; Salanova et al., 2019). This assumption is based on the idea that building on personal strengths, such as psychological capital (i.e., resilience, self-efficacy, hope and optimism; Luthans et al., 2015), is a more effective path to success than focusing on weaknesses (Donaldson et al., 2019); yet, in order to progress beyond survival and flourishing, both negative and positive aspects of the human condition must be acknowledged (Wong, 2016). Considering the ambiguity and complexity of the world, overcoming life's adversities and balancing between positive and negative experiences become necessary actions to strengthen and even positively transform one's personal resources (Wong, 2020).

In an organisational setting, individuals who strive to use their strengths on a daily basis are happier and more productive (Miglianico et al., 2020). The identification, development, and use of personal strengths can be trained, for example, by participating in positive psychological interventions in which evidence-based activities are applied to boost well-being (Bolier et al., 2013; Carr et al., 2021; Lomas et al., 2014). Some authors (Parks & Biswas-Diener, 2013) suggest that three criteria must be met for positive psychological interventions to be considered as such: (1) an emphasis on positive elements; (2) a positive outcome; and (3) a focus on improving wellness rather than treating disease. A recent meta-analysis by Carr et al. (2021) showed that evidence-based positive psychological interventions had positive effects on well-being, quality of life and strengths, and negative effects on ill-being (i.e., depression, anxiety, and stress) for clinical and non-clinical populations. Also, considering studies conducted in an organisational context, Meyers et al. (2013) found that positive psychological interventions improve employees' well-being and performance. Positive Psychological Coaching (PPC) is an example of such interventions that uses strengths as a fundamental element in the coaching practice (Burke, 2018). PPC has recently emerged as a methodology, grounded in Positive Psychology principles, and defined by van Zyl et al. (2020) as follows:

> Display quotations of over 40 words, or as needed. A short- to medium-term professional, collaborative relationship between a client and coach, aimed at the identification, utilization, optimization and development of personal/psychological strengths and resources in order

to enhance positive states, traits, and behaviors. Utilizing Socratic goal setting and positive psychological evidence-based approaches facilitate personal/professional growth, optimal functioning, enhanced well-being, the actualization of people's potential, and aid in coping with work-demands. (p. 11)

Previous literature suggested various elements that determine workplace coaching effectiveness (i.e., antecedents) related to the coach, the coachee, their relationship, and the coaching process itself (Albizu et al., 2019; Bozer & Jones, 2018). These elements refer to factors that can be altered and refined in order to better meet the client's specific needs and satisfaction in the coaching process. For instance, regarding (1) the coach: coaching performance/skills (de Haan et al., 2013) and coach credibility (Bozer et al., 2014); (2) the coachee: self-efficacy (Corbu et al., 2021; de Haan et al., 2013; Evers et al., 2006), coaching motivation and readiness of the coachee (Rekalde et al., 2015), and goal orientation (Bozer et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2016); (3) the relationship between coach and coachee: satisfactory relationship (Carter et al., 2017), interpersonal attraction (de Haan et al., 2013), trust and rapport (Cox, 2012; de Haan & Gannon, 2017); and (4) the process itself: feedback intervention (Nieminen et al., 2013; Sonesh et al., 2015).

In terms of underlying mechanisms, a systematic review, performed by Grover and Furnham (2016), highlighted the lack of investigation that exists in the study of the interaction between variables related to underlying mechanisms of effectiveness of coaching, although there are a few exceptions (Baron & Morin, 2009; de Haan et al., 2013; Sonesh et al., 2015). In these studies, the authors showed that working alliance is a potential mediator and, in one study (de Haan et al., 2013), a moderator between perceived coaching effectiveness and the inputs by coachee and coach (i.e., coachee's self-efficacy, coach's used techniques). This is a small step to understand what makes a coaching process effective. Exploring the underlying causes is essential for organisations because it provides guidance in determining how to implement coaching and ensuring that the coaching intervention is as effective as feasible.

Regarding the benefits of workplace coaching, research highlights its impact on well-being and performance (Gabriel et al., 2014; Jarosz, 2021; Peláez et al., 2020; van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2021), goal attainment (Corbu et al., 2021; Grant et al., 2009), managerial behaviour (Ballesteros-Sánchez et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Rekalde et al., 2017), and leadership skills (Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020). Overall, workplace coaching is a valuable methodology that helps individuals and organisations to improve skills, emotions, and work-related outcomes (Jones et al., 2016).

Despite the popularity and increased research on workplace coaching (for systematic reviews, see Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Theeboom et al., 2014), to the best of our knowledge, there is a lack of literature reviews that focus on PPC – specifically in organisational settings – and that analyse its effectiveness in terms of antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and outcomes. Therefore, the aims of this systematic review are as follows: (1) to identify the key factors that contribute to the success of PPC (i.e., antecedents); (2) to identify the underlying mechanisms that have been analysed as potential explanations for the intervention's success; and (3) to determine whether it is effective as a workplace intervention regarding its specific benefits (i.e., outcomes) for employees and organisations. To address these research objectives, we conducted a systematic review – focused on PPC effectiveness at the workplace – to summarise the findings of empirical studies, aligned with the objective of this study.

Methods

Research approach

This systematic review aims to examine the antecedents, outcomes, and underlying mechanisms that contribute to the effectiveness of PPC. Following the processes outlined by Denyer and Tranfield (2009), a literature search was performed using key terms and a scientific database search service. The selection of the articles was accomplished by carefully identifying, selecting, analysing, synthesising, and presenting the existing research on a certain topic (Booth et al., 2021), taking into account the established research criteria. To our knowledge, interventions based on PPC have not been documented in scientific literature so far.

Search strategy

In order to identify, evaluate, and synthesise all relevant prior studies to include in our review, four bibliographic databases were consulted: Web of Science, PsychInfo, Business Source Premier, and ABI/Inform Collection via ProQuest. The search terms used were classified into (1) primary terms ('positive psychology* coaching', 'positive coaching', 'strengths-based coaching', 'strengths coaching'), and (2) secondary terms (process OR programme OR intervention OR measure OR action OR technique impact OR influence OR evaluation OR effectiveness OR efficacy OR effect). First, each primary term was combined with the secondary and the Boolean terms (e.g., 'positive psychology* coaching' AND process OR programme OR intervention OR measure OR action OR technique impact OR influence OR evaluation OR effectiveness OR efficacy OR effect). Subsequently, a 'document types' and 'languages' filter was added. Using this search strategy, 505 titles were identified.

Eligibility criteria

Several criteria needed to be met to consider the studies relevant and aligned with the goal of this review: (1) the articles needed to be published in the Spanish or English language; (2) the type of document needed to be academic peer-reviewed papers and/or doctoral theses; (3) the focus of the study needed to be centred around positive psychological coaching; (4) the studies needed to be based on Positive Psychology as a theoretical framework; (5) the study needed to address antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and/or outcomes that lead to PPC's effectiveness; (6) the studies needed to be conducted in an organisational setting (workplace coaching, executive coaching, business coaching); and (7) the studies needed to examine empirical data. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were considered.

In terms of exclusion criteria, the following were excluded: (1) articles focusing on instrument development; (2) studies based on intervention, centred on life, sport, education, health, and clinical coaching; and (3) books, chapters, commentaries, conference proceedings, and conceptual studies.

Selection bias

Several measures were implemented to mitigate selection bias and improve the systematic review's reliability, replicability, and transparency. First, the four authors met to

establish the research question, clarify concepts, and determine the search terms as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Subsequently, two of the authors (a.k.a., reviewers) independently conducted the search and review of the articles, following the search strategy and eligibility criteria; the results were shared and discussed. This was done to guarantee that no records were omitted during the selection procedure (Moher et al., 2009). Afterwards, the two remaining authors (a.k.a., judges) settled the doubts regarding the studies involving disagreement between the reviewers, and all four authors made the final decision regarding which articles were finally included in the review.

Study selection and synthesis

For this review, the search in the databases was conducted applying selection criteria 1 (language), and 2 (peer-reviewed papers and/or doctoral theses). The initial search resulted in 72 items in Web of Science, 101 items in PsychInfo, 114 items in Business Source Premier, and 177 items in ABI/Inform Collection via ProQuest. After removing the duplicates, 355 unique titles were withheld.

Subsequently, the titles and abstracts were screened by each reviewer, leaving 69 for the first reviewer and 94 for the second reviewer. The articles obtained were then read in their entirety to decide which ones went through to the next phase, based on the eligibility criteria. The first reviewer selected 9, marked 32 as doubtful, and excluded 28, while the second reviewer selected 16, marked 7 as doubtful, and excluded 71. Subsequently, the results of each were pooled and discussed, obtaining 9 articles in agreement and 13 in disagreement. One additional article, identified through other sources, was included since it was aligned with the purpose of this review, leaving a total of 10 articles in agreement. The judges evaluated and resolved the doubts concerning the 13 papers in disagreement. A total of 15 studies were included in the final selection. Most of the disqualified items were excluded for being theoretical and not peer-reviewed papers, followed by studies based on coaching interventions in areas such as life, sports, education, health, and clinical coaching. The third most prevalent reason for exclusion concerned articles not addressing coaching interventions, followed by literature reviews. In fifth place, studies were excluded because they were not conducted in a work setting.

With the final articles chosen, data were processed through thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013). This procedure allows exploring patterns across data and classifying the information into categories. Subsequently, the flowchart, summary tables, and manuscript were designed. The whole process was carried out using the Mendeley software program for storage and categorisation of the articles, Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet for reference management and review, and Rayyan software for the assessment of the judges. Figure 1 shows the flow diagram representing the search and retrieval process.

Results

As shown in Figure 1, 15 studies met the inclusion criteria and were reviewed for this article. Predominantly, the investigations were peer-reviewed journal articles (Corbu et al., 2021; Elston & Boniwell, 2011; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; Guzmán et al., 2017; Kakarala et al., 2018; Moin & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Palamara et al., 2015; Peláez et al., 2020; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020; Sparrow, 2007; Toogood, 2012; van der
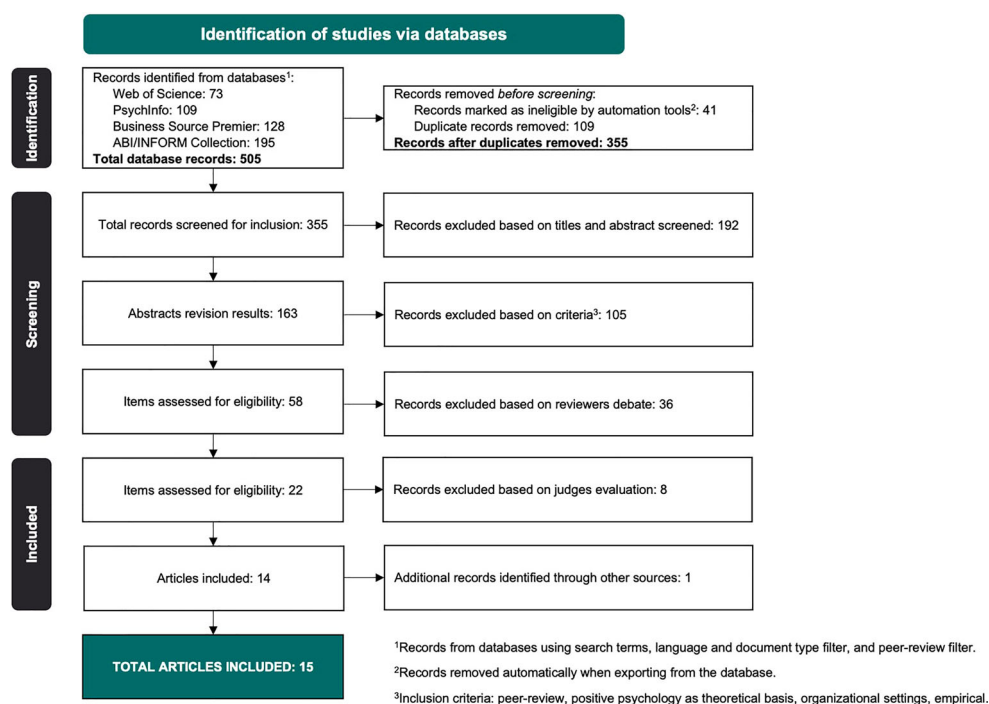
Figure 1. Flow diagram_PPC effectiveness.

Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020; van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2008), one was a doctoral dissertation (Parsons, 2016). Following a thorough assessment of the papers, the results are presented in accordance with the following four key themes: (1) study characteristics; (2) PPC antecedents; (3) PPC underlying mechanisms; and (4) PPC outcomes.

Study characteristics

The research yielded 15 articles with a total number of 472 participants. The sample sizes varied from $N = 4$ (Moin & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021) to $N = 98$ (Palamara et al., 2015), with a mean of 29.5 ($SD = 23.62$). Of the 15 research articles, 10 were published in Europe (6 in the United Kingdom, 3 in Spain, and 1 in Portugal), 3 in North America (the United States), 1 in Australia, and 1 in Africa (South Africa). The publication time span ranged from 2007 to 2022, with the majority released during the previous decade.

Qualitative empirical surveys accounted for most of these studies ($N = 7$), while six other studies used a quantitative approach ($N = 6$). Two papers employed a mixed-approach strategy combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Furthermore, 11 were non-experimental, 4 were quasi-experimental, and 7 used a longitudinal study design, 4 of which using a pre–post-follow-up research model (Corbu et al., 2021; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; Peláez et al., 2020; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020). Data for the qualitative research was gathered using semi-structured interviews ($N = 7$). Generally, the publications used self-report data ($N = 10$), while 2 studies conducted a 360°

evaluation (Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020), and 3 used variety rating sources (Guzmán et al., 2017: resident, staff, and relatives; Kakarala et al., 2018: interns and coaches; Peláez et al., 2020: self-report and supervisor).

The characteristics of the studies, including sample, method, data collection, rating sources, and analysis, are presented in Table 1.

Antecedents

Six studies identified antecedents that can be considered significant factors in the coaching process (Corbu et al., 2021; Elston & Boniwell, 2011; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; Moin & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Toogood, 2012; van der Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020). Most of these studies ($N = 4$) were qualitative and employed semi-structured interviews to conduct an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the elements that contribute to the effectiveness of the coaching process. Only two studies used a quantitative approach (Corbu et al., 2021; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021). Corbu et al. (2021) evaluated an antecedent (i.e., goal-related self-efficacy) to predict the coaching outcome (i.e., goal attainment), following a controlled trial design with measurements at three points in time to confirm the impact of the variable on the coachees' performance during the coaching process. Fontes and Dello Russo (2021) tested the success of a coaching intervention in improving work-related outcomes considering the mediating effects of psychological capital on job attitudes. The results showed that goal-related self-efficacy, goal setting, and the active participation of coaches in providing feedback were found to be significant factors for achieving positive work-related outcomes.

According to 3 of the 6 studies (Elston & Boniwell, 2011; Toogood, 2012; van der Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020), focusing on the coachees' strengths is an effective approach that contributes positively to their personal and professional development. Elston and Boniwell (2011) sought to explain – through a coaching intervention and the VIA strengths inventory – the value of using strengths at work. Following a grounded theory approach, they found that the identification and deliberate use of strengths in the workplace was perceived as valuable and led to experience positive emotions, feeling more appreciated, more emphasis on the positive, increased authenticity, and inspiration to take action. The value of strengths resulted in a 'virtuous circle' in which the benefits of using strengths diminish the barriers (i.e., self-concept, commitment, organisational fit) that previously burdened their use. From the perspective of the coaches who employed the strengths-based approach, Toogood (2012) also observed that a focus on the coachees' strengths could lead to a greater level of fulfilment for both coach and coachee. The use of phenomenological analysis to examine data from in-depth semi-structured interviews has shown that coaches' motivation to focus on strengths in the coaching process was based on a sense of authenticity and alignment, and their beliefs about the effectiveness of focusing on strengths for coachees. All the participants in this study endorsed the idea that conscious awareness and application of strengths leads to positive outcomes. Following a similar methodology, the findings of van der Walt and van Coller-Peter (2020) highlighted the efficacy of employing a strengths-based approach (i.e., recognising and building on existing strengths during coaching) to raise leaders' consciousness of integrity and achieve positive outcomes. The authors suggested that underlying mechanisms through which strengths awareness and development lead to positive leader outcomes,

Table 1. Characteristics of the studies ($N = 15$).

N°	Author/year	Country	Sample	Method/Design	Data collection	Rating sources	Analysis
1	Corbu et al. (2021)	Spain	60 participants (35 for EX; 25 for WL)	Quantitative Quasi-experimental Longitudinal Control trial	Pre-post-FUP	Self-report	ANOVA with 2×2 repeated measures Paired-sample t-test Simple linear regression
2	Elston and Boniwell (2011)	UK	6 participants	Qualitative	3 semi-structured interviews	Self-report	Grounded theory
3	Fontes and Dello Russo (2021)	Portugal	56 participants (32 for EX; 24 for WL)	Quantitative Quasi-experimental Longitudinal Control trial	Pre-Post-FUP	Self-report 360° format: self-report, peers, and supervisor.	ANOVA with 2×2 repeated measures Conditional process analysis using 95% bootstrap (CI) with 5,000 bootstrap samples
4	Guzmán et al. (2017)	UK	28 staff	Qualitative Focus group	Semi-structured interviews	Resident Staff Relative	Critical case sampling Coding Charting and Mapping
5	Kakarala et al. (2018)	US	21 participants (12 interns; 9 coaches)	Quantitative Longitudinal	Baseline-FUP	Interns Coaches	Response rate (percentages)
6	Moin and van Nieuwerburgh (2021)	UK	4 participants	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	Self-report	IPA NVivo
7	Palamara et al. (2015)	US	26 coaches 72 interns	Quantitative Longitudinal	Pre-Post	Self-report	Response rate (percentages)
8	Parsons (2016)	US	12 participants	Qualitative	Semi-structured telephone interviews	Self-report	NVivo Codes and themes IPA
9	Peláez et al. (2020)	Spain	60 participants (35 for EX; 25 for WL)	Quantitative Qualitative Quasi-experimental Longitudinal Control trial	Pre-post-FUP	Self-report Supervisor	ANOVA with 2×2 repeated measures Univariate analysis Paired-sample t-tests Themes and percentages (qualitative).
10	Peláez Zuberbühler et al. (2020)	Spain	41 participants (25 for EX; 16 for WL)	Quantitative Qualitative Quasi-experimental Longitudinal Control trial	Pre-post-FUP	360° format: Self-report Supervisor Employees	ANOVA with 2×2 repeated measures Univariate analysis Paired-sample t-tests Interpretive content analysis: coding and frequencies per category.

11	Sparrow (2007)	UK	51 organisations	Quantitative	Cross-sectional survey analyses	Self-report	One way ANOVA Post hoc multiple comparisons of means Paired-sample t-test
12	Toogood (2012)	UK	6 participants	Qualitative	In-depth interviews Semi-structured interview	Self-report	IPA
13	van der Walt and van Coller-Peter (2020)	South Africa	6 participants	Qualitative	Semi-structured Interviews Reflective notes of the researcher coach	Self-report	IPA ATLAS: Qualitative Data Analysis & Research Software
14	van Nieuwerburgh et al. (2021)	UK	6 participants	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	Self-report	IPA
15	Yu et al. (2008)	Australia	17 participants	Quantitative Longitudinal	Pre-post	Self-report	Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test

such as acting consistently, experimenting with new behaviours, and self-examination to support immediate change.

In the remaining study, Moin and van Nieuwerburgh (2021) found that facing one's unconscious bias is challenging but necessary to increase self-awareness and build a trusted coaching relationship, resulting in a positive experience that broadened the coachees' thinking and perspective throughout the coaching process. The aim of the study was to explore the participants' conscious experiences using prerequisite activities, involving online Unconscious Bias Training (UBT) and the results from the completion of the Implicit Association Test (IAT), followed by Positive Psychological Coaching (PPC); the data were analysed by conducting an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The authors conclude that participants were concerned about their unconscious biases, increasing self-awareness, which was refocused with a strengths-based exercise, resulting in experiencing positive affect. In addition, all participants expressed willingness to take action and improve, leading to an increased sense of self-efficacy.

Underlying mechanisms

Four studies measured mechanisms underlying the relationship between antecedents and outcomes variables (Elston & Boniwell, 2011; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; van der Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020; Yu et al., 2008). Two of them employed a qualitative approach (Elston & Boniwell, 2011; van der Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020), while Fontes and Dello Russo (2021) and Yu et al. (2008) reported a quantitative control trial study. Although different underlying mechanisms were tested in the four studies, all of them play mediating roles between the coaching intervention and various positive outcomes, and are related to positive personal (i.e., positive attitude, psychological capital, focus on positive outcomes, self-insight, goal attainment, motivation) or organisational (i.e., positive organisational fit, commitment) factors.

Elston and Boniwell (2011) investigated the efficacy and benefits of strengths-based coaching using grounded theory analyses, concentrating on the experience of 6 female coachees from a financial service. Findings indicated that certain factors affected the degree to which participants used their strengths. In order words, the study revealed important underlying mechanisms that explain how the identification and deliberate use of strengths in the workplace after participating in a coaching intervention led to positive outcomes (i.e., positive emotions, inspiring action, sense of achievement). These mediators were positive self-concept, commitment to work, positive attitude, positive organisational fit, balance of self-focus/other focus, and positive relationship with authority figures. Using a similar qualitative design, but following an interpretative phenomenological analysis, van der Walt and van Coller-Peter (2020) aimed to provide insight into the mechanisms that enable the development of leaders' awareness of integrity to support positive outcomes as a result of participating in a strengths-based coaching intervention. The authors tested and proved that elements – such as creating a safe space, recognising existing strengths during coaching to build on them, and considering the participants' agenda for the duration of the coaching – are important mediating mechanisms that support the coachees' development of awareness, thus leading to positive leader outcomes such as consistently doing the right thing, experimenting with change, and the impact of self-reflection to support immediate change. In a quasi-

experimental study with professionals working in a digital marketing agency, Fontes and Dello Russo (2021) tested whether a coaching intervention, grounded in goal setting and conservation of resources theories, was effective in improving job attitudes – such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment – and job performance, through psychological capital as mediator. The mediating effect was supported for job attitudes and for one dimension of job performance (i.e., collaboration) and lasted over time, leading to continued improved attitudes and behaviours, provided by coaching during the goal-setting process. Finally, Yu et al. (2008) evaluated the impact of coaching on work-related behaviours and well-being. In an attempt to understand why the coaching intervention had such an impact, the researchers discovered that multiple underlying mechanisms could explain the outcomes. Changes in goal attainment, self-insight, and role breadth self-efficacy suggested that a coaching programme with a primary focus on developing these mechanisms is more likely to be successful.

Outcomes

All 15 selected studies proposed and tested outcomes variables, related to participating in or based on experiences from PPC. After analysing the data collected, results from the 15 selected studies have been classified, based on the outcome type: (1) well-being-related outcomes (i.e., psychological capital, the value of strengths, self-awareness, work engagement, greater abilities to solve work and life challenges, authenticity, growth, alleviation of negative emotions, confidence, motivation, satisfaction, lower levels of burnout, and emotional exhaustion); (2) work-related outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job performance, meaningful relationships at work, leadership skills or behaviours, proactivity); and (3) coaching-related outcomes (i.e., goal attainment, satisfaction with the process, trusted coaching relationship). Overall, the most prominent outcomes among the selected studies were related to well-being (i.e., satisfaction, $N = 4$; well-being, $N = 4$; psychological capital, $N = 3$; confidence, $N = 2$; less burnout, $N = 2$; work engagement, $N = 2$). To a lesser extent, job performance ($N = 6$), goal attainment ($N = 6$), self-awareness ($N = 6$), and (personal or professional) growth ($N = 4$) were also important positive outcomes within the studies.

Most studies ($N = 9$; Guzmán et al., 2017; Kakarala et al., 2018; Palamara et al., 2015; Parsons, 2016; Peláez et al., 2020; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020; Sparrow, 2007; van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2008) measured outcomes related to coaching, without considering antecedents or underlying mechanisms. In a quasi-experimental longitudinal study, Yu et al. (2008) analysed the effectiveness of a workplace coaching programme, aimed at enhancing the work behaviours and well-being of nursing managers in a healthcare institution. Findings of this study provide preliminary evidence that coaching enhances workplace behaviours in both core task performance and proactive performance behaviours (i.e., taking charge, individual innovation). In a similar pre–post study with healthcare professionals, Palamara et al. (2015) evaluated a programme to support intern professional development through PPC. Results demonstrated less emotional exhaustion and burnout in participants than reported before the intervention programme. In a cross-sectional study, Sparrow (2007) tested outcomes, associated with life coaching in the workplace, and found that performance coaching is better understood than life coaching for large and small organisations. Coaching has a significantly smaller

impact on entrepreneurship and social purpose outcomes than on more general organisational outcomes. Three other studies, testing outcomes variables of PPC, used qualitative designs. For instance, Parsons' (2016) findings support the use of positive psychological interventions in executive coaching with midlife customers, particularly enhancing goal achievement, personal and professional growth, and the resolution of work and life challenges over time and within a strong client-coach relationship. Using framework analysis, Guzmán et al. (2017) study provided qualitative evidence about the effectiveness of a staff training intervention, based on Positive Psychology, and following the GROW coaching model (Goals, Reality, Options and Will) for improving staff–resident relationships (i.e., communication) and enhancing happiness and hope. More recently, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis design study by van Nieuwerburgh et al. (2021) provided insight into how PPC, implemented with six financial service employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, led to positive outcomes such as valuing opportunity for safe reflection, increasing awareness, alleviating negative emotions, identifying a way forward, and renewing confidence. Finally, three of these nine studies used mixed method designs to test their objectives. In one of these studies, Kakarala et al. (2018) implemented a development coaching programme with healthcare residents and found a decrease in their burnout levels, positive coaching experience, and a positive evaluation of the quality of communication with their coaches. Using a control trial design and an interpretative content analysis, Peláez et al. (2020) tested a Strengths-based micro-Coaching intervention with 60 employees from an automotive industry company. Findings revealed an increase in their levels of work engagement, job performance, goal attainment, self-awareness, strengths identification and development, job satisfaction, and well-being. Following a similar study design, Peláez Zuberbühler et al. (2020) designed and tested a Coaching-based leadership intervention programme with 41 managers from the industry sector, with results showing that the intervention was successful in increasing coaching-based leadership skills, psychological capital, work engagement, in-role and extra-role performance, self-awareness, and identification and use of personal strengths.

From the 15 selected studies, 6 of them (Corbu et al., 2021; Elston & Boniwell, 2011; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; Moin & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Toogood, 2012; van der Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020) included antecedents or underlying mechanisms to explain how PPC exerts its influence on well-being and work-related outcomes. All these studies have been described in previous sections. Using a qualitative design, Elston and Boniwell (2011) showed how key antecedents and mechanisms of strengths-based coaching influence the following positive outcomes: positive emotion, inspiring action, attention to the positive, awareness of own value, feeling authentic, valuing difference, sense of achievement, and positive reflections from others. Using similar qualitative methods, Toogood (2012) demonstrated how awareness, identification and use of strengths enhanced faster personal growth, easier and more enjoyable goal attainment, a broader perspective, confidence, self-belief, a sense of authenticity, and a greater sense of fulfilment. Following a similar methodology, van der Walt and van Coller-Peter (2020) also found that awareness and development of strengths acted as antecedents of the leader's awareness of integrity to drive positive outcomes. More recently, the Moin and van Nieuwerburgh (2021) study revealed important outcomes of a PPC intervention, such as introspection and reflexivity, enhanced self-awareness,

self-efficacy, motivation to improve self, and trusted coaching relationship. The two remaining studies used quantitative control trial designs in which psychological capital and performance-related variables play different roles in the research models. Corbu et al. (2021) tested and demonstrated the effect of PPC on psychological capital and the predictor effect of goal-related self-efficacy on goal attainment. Fontes and Dello Russo (2021) findings showed a positive effect of coaching intervention on psychological capital, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job performance, where these outcomes were mediated by psychological capital.

Table 2 summarises the main findings, categorised into the themes of this systematic review. Figure 2 illustrates a summary of the most relevant PPC success factors (i.e., antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and outcomes).

Discussion and future directions

This systematic review aimed at broadening the understanding of the effectiveness of PPC at work by systematically integrating previous empirical research on (1) the factors that contribute to the intervention's success (i.e., antecedents); (2) the underlying mechanisms that have been studied as potential explanations for the intervention's success; and (3) the intervention's feasibility as a workplace intervention and the specific benefits it offers to employees and organisations (i.e., outcomes). This section provides a synthesis, as well as theoretical and practical implications, and future research directions, based on an examination of 15 research papers for the central themes, highlighted in the review.

Study characteristics

Over the different studies covered in this review, a range of samples, methods, data sources, and analyses were employed. Despite the many positive aspects (i.e., variety of samples, diverse sectors, data sources, and analyses), the studies also included several drawbacks that needed to be considered. First, most studies reported a qualitative or quantitative methodology, while only two used mixed-method designs. Therefore, future research should incorporate mixed method designs to gain deeper insight into PPC and its relation to work-related parameters by capturing salient characteristics and dynamics. Second, only a few of the longitudinal studies that used quantitative or mixed methods designs employed a random sampling methodology. Hence, randomised control trials might be required in future research to examine the effectiveness of PPC interventions within organisations. Lastly, most studies were conducted at the individual level and relied on self-reported data for their analyses. A multilevel approach, considering not only the individual, but also group, leader, and/or organisational levels, should be integrated when implementing and testing interventions in the work field in order to reach optimal degrees of effectiveness (Nielsen et al., 2018). Moreover, multilevel analysis and a 360-degree format are two methods that could be further explored to improve study design. Grover and Furnham (2016, p. 26) argued that 'as an industry, coaching requires more rigorous methodology, statistical analysis, and larger sample sizes to increase the generalizability of coaching efficacy'. While we agree with this statement, we believe it is equally essential to formulate good research questions and determine the optimal research strategy to answer them. As highlighted in this review, the

Table 2. Summary of antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and outcomes ($N = 15$).

N°	Author/year	Antecedents	Underlying mechanisms	Outcomes
1	Corbu et al. (2021)	Goal-Related Self-Efficacy	N/A	Psychological Capital, Goal Attainment
2	Elston and Boniwell (2011)	Identification, deliberated use of strengths, and strengths as 'authentic parts of themselves'.	Self-concept. Commitment. Positive attitude. Organisational fit. Balance of self/other focus. Relationship with authority figures.	Positive emotion. Inspiring action. Attention to the positive. Awareness of own value. Feeling authentic. Valuing difference. Sense of achievement. Positive reflections from others.
3	Fontes and Dello Russo (2021)	Goal setting. Reformulating failure attribution. Coaches' feedback.	Psychological Capital.	Psychological Capital. Job satisfaction. Organisational commitment. Collaboration (job performance).
4	Guzmán et al. (2017)	N/A	N/A	Staff–resident relationships. Happiness. Hope.
5	Kakarala et al. (2018)	N/A	N/A	Burnout reduction. Positive coaching experience. Positive communication with coaches.
6	Moin and van Nieuwerburgh (2021)	Unconscious biases.	N/A	Enhanced self-awareness. Trusted coaching relationship. Introspection and reflexivity. Increased self-efficacy. Motivation to improve self.
7	Palamara et al. (2015)	N/A	N/A	Lower levels of emotional exhaustion. Lower levels of burnout.
8	Parsons (2016)	N/A	N/A	Goal achievement. Personal and professional growth. Resolution of work and life challenges over time.
9	Peláez et al. (2020)	N/A	N/A	Work engagement. Job performance. Goal attainment. Self-awareness. Strength's identification and development. Job satisfaction. Well-being.
10	Peláez Zuberbühler et al. (2020)	N/A	N/A	Coaching-based leadership skills. Psychological Capital. Work engagement. In-role and extra-role performance. Awareness and professional insight. Increased individual and/or team performance. Increased personal strengths/ resources. Positive changes in the environment.
11	Sparrow (2007)	N/A	N/A	Understanding level of performance coaching is higher than life coaching Less impact upon entrepreneurship and social purpose outcomes than general organisational outcomes.
12	Toogood (2012)	Strengths-based approach. Identification, use and focus	N/A	Faster personal growth. Efficient and joyful goal attainment.

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

N°	Author/year	Antecedents	Underlying mechanisms	Outcomes
		of strengths. Client-led (importance of client readiness). Conscious awareness of strengths.		Sense of authenticity. Broader perspective and choices. Confidence. Coaches' well-being and satisfaction. Fulfilment.
13	van der Walt and van Coller-Peter (2020)	Recognition of existing strengths during coaching, and building on them.	A safe space to explore. Focus on positive outcomes. Time as factor.	Leaders' awareness of the importance of integrity and driving positive leader outcomes.
14	van Nieuwerburgh et al. (2021)	N/A	N/A	Valuing opportunity for safe reflection. Increasing awareness. Alleviation of negative emotions. Re-energised by identifying a way forward. Renewed confidence.
15	Yu et al. (2008)	N/A	Goal attainment. Self-insight aspect of metacognition. Role breadth self-efficacy (RBSE).	Proactive performance behaviours (taking charge, individual innovation). Core task performance.

interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) sheds light on key elements that contribute to the effectiveness of the PPC process (i.e., the value of using strengths at work, the identification and deliberate use of strengths, the conscious awareness and application of strengths, and recognising and building on existing strengths during coaching). Exploratory and descriptive studies in a relatively new field of investigation may set the stage for later studies that use other techniques to focus on specific aspects or nuances of the
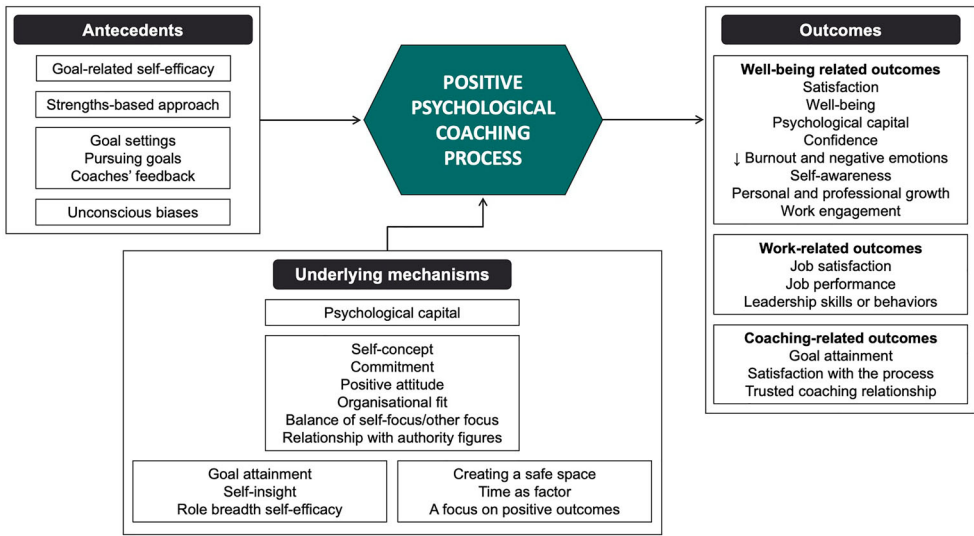

Figure 2. Summary diagram_PPC effectiveness.

findings, while still yielding useful information for present and future applications (van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2021).

Antecedents

The identification and use of strengths were the most prevalent drivers used in the coaching process that positively impacted the personal and professional development of individuals. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that, in an organisational setting, individuals aiming at applying their strengths on a daily basis are more productive and happier (Miglianico et al., 2020). Moreover, goal-setting related variables, were found to be important antecedents in coaching for achieving positive work-related outcomes. Based on the (Review, Evaluate, Goal, Reality, Options, and Will) RE-GROW model (Grant, 2013), goal-directed interventions and self-efficacy were found to be key requirements for coaching performance (de Haan et al., 2013). Moreover, some authors have indicated that a shift in mindset and abilities is essential to coaching effectiveness (Theeboom et al., 2016), and this notion has been latent in coaching practice for some time. Setting of and working towards goals has a substantial impact on enhancing positive resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018), which can affect one's relationship with the environment (Luthans & Peterson, 2003). Despite the studies following a proper research design, more research is required to replicate the results and broaden the body of literature.

Although promising results were obtained in general, several limitations associated with the selected studies should be considered. First, four of the six studies used an IPA technique that requires confirmation, for example through traditional randomised controlled trials, to examine what works, or employing the Realist Evaluation approach (Nielsen & Miraglia, 2017) to pursue an accurate and holistic evaluation of what works, for whom, and the circumstances under which interventions produce the intended effects. Future research should consider expanding the literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the value of using strengths at work. Also, it could be interesting for future research to identify other contextual factors (such as leadership commitment, context for participation, readiness for change, work demands, job insecurity, etc.) that influence the coaching outcomes in order to determine the circumstances under which the working mechanisms in the coaching process yield the desired results. Second, the studies were analysed at an individual level. More research is needed to examine the multilevel interactions among these dimensions. Finally, all studies, except for one, relied on self-reported data. To reduce bias and 'social desirability', multiple rating sources could offer a broader – and thus likely more accurate – version of the scenario.

Underlying mechanisms

Research findings from studies examining the relationship between antecedents and outcome variables revealed positive results when mediation was considered. Throughout the studies, personal as well as organisational aspects were found to play mediating roles between the coaching intervention and positive outcomes. Concerns that organisations may have about coaching can be alleviated by gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that mediate the interventions' effectiveness. For instance, this is especially

relevant when referring to the suitability of the PPC as a workplace intervention to enhance performance or the importance of the coach-coachee relationship for the interventions' effectiveness (Grover & Furnham, 2016). Findings from the studies included in this systematic review support past studies showing that identifying and activating resources and strengths can be a powerful catalyst for change (Grant, 2017; Grant & O'Connor, 2018).

This review's findings demonstrated an upward trend in investigating the relationship between PPC and positive outcomes through mediation. However, several limitations should be acknowledged to broaden and strengthen future research in this area. First, since the underlying mechanisms were assessed and analysed, using a variety of approaches, the findings from the research cannot be compared. Moreover, only two studies collected data at multiple points in time, and only one collected a follow-up measure. To evaluate whether the effects of coaching are sustained or become visible after some time, future research should focus on gathering data at various points in time and for longer periods after the intervention. Second, one of the advantages of the studies that were considered is the diversity of the factors (such as positive attitude, psychological capital, focus on positive outcomes, self-insight, goal attainment, motivation, positive organisational fit, commitment) that were examined. However, the results of the qualitative investigations still need to be validated by randomised control trial studies or a process evaluation approach. The process evaluation approach suggests the testing of working mechanisms during and after the intervention at several points in time, such as the extent to which participants transfer what they have learned into daily practices and how this influences the overall result of the intervention (Nielsen et al., 2023). Third, we suggest conducting multilevel research that considers both the unit and organisational levels of analysis (i.e., team and organisation-related performance, productivity, achievement of organisational goals, etc.).

Overall, there is still a dearth of studies examining the impact of the aforementioned factors on PPC interventions. Further studies, with a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method design, should validate and build upon the results and suggestions presented here.

Outcomes

All studies analysed examined outcome variables, related to the participation or based on experiences from PPC. Most of them were qualitative surveys, based on semi-structured interviews. An in-depth analysis of the studies resulted in identifying and classifying the collected data into three main categories (well-being, work, and coaching-related outcomes). It has been demonstrated in previous literature that coaching results in positive outcomes for both individual and organisation (for more information, see the review by Jones et al., 2016). These outcomes include improved work performance, well-being, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, self-confidence, and employee engagement, amongst others (Peláez et al., 2020). As a result, unsurprisingly, this positive articulating method has gained popularity as a valuable technique for personal and professional development (Haberlin, 2019).

Findings from the studies included in this review, focusing on well-being-related outcomes, build on existing evidence of the positive impact of workplace coaching on well-

being (Gabriel et al., 2014; Jarosz, 2021). In terms of work-related outcomes, data helped in clarifying the benefits of PPC interventions on organisational settings. Because of its focus on outcomes, competences, and goal achievement, PPC interventions have the potential to yield timely effects that meet expectations in workplace coaching contexts (Wang et al., 2022). The findings on coaching-related outcomes provide further insight into the key factors that make the process successful, which is consistent with the literature, surrounding the purpose of coaching to help individuals achieve valued goals (Boniwell & Kauffman, 2018, p. 153).

Despite the efforts that have been made to identify the effects that PPC has on the factors associated with workplace, additional research is required to accurately evaluate its effectiveness. Several limitations associated with the chosen studies must be considered. First, only four of the studies included pre/post follow-up evaluations, and only three of the studies included assessments at two different points in time. Future research should deliver an effort in gathering data at different points in time to test the impact's sustainability. Second, a total of seven studies adopted a longitudinal methodology. An imperative recommendation is that future research should expand beyond cross-sectional relational studies and focus on longitudinal studies to confirm evidence for causal interactions. Future research should also confirm the efficacy of PPC interventions and their influence on work-related constructs, utilising reliable methodologies such as randomised controlled designs, or based on a Realist evaluation approach considering the context factors and working mechanisms influencing the desired outcomes (Nielsen & Miraglia, 2017). Central to realist evaluation is testing under which circumstances (i.e., context factors such as readiness for change, management commitment, and work demands) the working ingredients (i.e., mechanisms such as transfer of training, opportunities to integrate learning, and social support) of the interventions are triggered and enable the intended effects (i.e., outcomes) (Abildgaard et al., 2020). Such research would strengthen the argument for corporations to invest in PPC interventions. To further solidify the findings, more qualitative and mixed-method investigation is necessary. Third, we suggest designing multilevel studies that consider individual, group, and organisational levels. Finally, forthcoming studies ought to evaluate variables using a 360° format, including a range of rating sources (i.e., self-perceived, peers, supervisors, and objective metrics) to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the results and value of the intervention (Millar et al., 2018). Overall, further empirical investigation is required to establish PPC intervention as a workplace strategy that is worthwhile.

Limitations and future directions

While several measures were taken to improve the relevance and reliability of this study, its research design and generalisability still have some flaws. First, the review only included studies, published in peer-reviewed journals in English or Spanish, which may have led to potential bias and a limited body of research. Second, this review may have been limited in its ability to provide a comprehensive overview, since the analysis of the data was primarily based on empirical studies and not on grey literature. Therefore, in order to deepen the knowledge of the PPC concept, future research ought to include other sources of information and languages in their

selection criteria (e.g., books, editorials, and merely conceptual studies). Third, the selection of articles for the review may have been constrained by the application of strict boundary conditions (inclusion/exclusion criteria). For example, some researchers may have implemented a PPC process but labelled it differently than the terms used in the search process. Fourth, neither the quality of the included studies nor the methodology implemented were appraised in this review. Finally, speculating about the effectiveness of the PPC interventions is challenging, due to the limited number of empirical studies currently available. This systematic review is a first step in that direction, providing an agenda for further research into specific PPC effects in organisational settings.

Theoretical and practical implications

The current review added several important insights to the literature. First, it gives a comprehensive analysis of the success of PPC interventions to highlight their value and validity within the organisation's environment. Second, it expands the understanding of the role of antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and outcomes in the process, and recognises knowledge gaps. Considering the novelty of PPC as a scientific concept, it is necessary to lay the groundwork in terms of a definition, a theoretical framework model, tools, and its impact on work-related parameters. The PPC model and definition were provided by van Zyl et al. (2020), while Richter et al. (2021) presented a classification of techniques and tools to aid the PPC process. This review summarises the findings of the latest studies that evaluate the effectiveness of PPC. As a result of this study, researchers will be better equipped to examine key success factors of the coaching process and provide empirical validation of the interventions in the workplace. Coaches can benefit from this research to improve their performance in the coaching process by considering the factors that have shown themselves crucial in the delivery of a high-quality service to their clients. PPC is an attractive investment opportunity for corporations since it helps to identify organisational and individual areas for growth and improvement. Finally, the review provides novel avenues for future investigation and some methodological considerations in this emerging field.

Conclusions

A systematic review was conducted to critically identify and describe available empirical research on PPC effectiveness at work. Based on the results from the selected empirical studies, a comprehensive model is provided, integrating the most relevant success factors (i.e., goal-related self-efficacy, strengths identification and use, goal setting, the coaches' feedback and unconscious biases), process mechanisms (i.e., personal resources such as psychological capital and positive attitude, organisational fit, goal attainment, self-insight, a safe space during coaching, time as factor, among others), and outcomes (well-being-related outcomes such as increased psychological well-being, satisfaction and psychological capital; work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, performance and leadership skills; and coaching-related outcomes such as goal attainment, coaching relationship and satisfaction with the process) that contribute to the effectiveness of PPC.

Our results provide important knowledge for practitioners and organisations as to what factors need to be focused on when performing PPC interventions with workers to ensure positive effects on employee development and well-being, and organisational productivity. Future studies should focus on organisational contextual factors and working ingredients of the coaching process to examine the circumstances under which the underlying mechanisms enable the intended outcomes.

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