

Covid 19 – Positive Psychology Strengths Based Coaching Research Study



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Experience of strengths based positive psychology coaching (PCC) whilst hybrid working and perceived effect on well-being and flourishing: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Motivations for the Study

- Two decades working in Financial Services in London in senior HR roles
- My own experience of languishing and cycles of burnout
- Covid and the great resignation/ quiet quitting
- An interest in finding a toolkit to help talented women to flourish both at work and at home



Importance of study

Addresses gap in our understanding of how PPC is experienced by women affected by new hybrid working practices in a post pandemic era

Help to provide insights into how PPC can support the well-being of employees in a post pandemic era

Contributes to the limited research into the experience of work for women working in financial services

Supports the growing body of evidence in the value of combining coaching and positive psychology and using it as an effective tool to improve well-being in the workplace

Importance of study

Codd, (2020) a recent report by Deloitte claims that 82% of professional women believed the pandemic has adversely impacted their lives with negative impacts on their well-being, work life balance and career prospects being felt

Codd & Parmelee, (2022) study of professional women across all sectors claims that more than 50% of women are feeling more stressed than a year ago with not enough adequate support from their employers

Methodology

Design

- Qualitative research approach to allow for the discovery of new insights and themes (Holliday, 2002)
- IPA study considered most appropriate due to ability to provide detailed examinations of the coachees personal lived experiences (Smith et al., 2015)

Participants

- Participant numbers kept intentionally small at 6 as with larger sample sizes the less detailed analysis that can be done (Kampman et al, 2020)

Methodology

- Participants recruited through the researchers established network in Financial Services
- Several HR departments were contacted to ensure adequate take up of participants
- The age range of participants were 30-45 years old
- All participants identified as White British - whilst not diverse their similarities was useful in adding weight to the participants experience when consistent (Elston & Boniwell, 2011)

Methodology

- Pseudonyms given to participants to maintain anonymity
- Prior to Covid-19 all participants work environments had been office based

Methodology

Procedure

- Participants invited to participate in 3X60 minute strengths based coaching sessions with approximately a two - week gap in between sessions
- Prior to the first session a VIA (classification of character strengths) strengths intervention pack sent online and participants asked to pick out top 5 strengths
- Following the interventions, a 30 min semi-structured interview were set up with participants to explore in depth their experiences
- Coaching and interviews conducted by the researcher

Methodology

Data Analysis

- Data analysis was conducted in line with original IPA guidelines (Smith et al., 2009)
- The author acknowledges that there have been recent changes to IPA analysis and terminology (Smith et al., 2022) however understands that both guidelines will be used in parallel and as such the 2009 guidelines followed

Ethical Considerations

- University of East London, U.K Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for the study
- The study has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the british psychological society

Findings

5 Strong group themes emerged

1. Positive Well-being

2. Re-framing of negative emotions

3. Increased awareness

4. Increased confidence

5. A new toolkit for inner work

Positive Well-being

The experiences of participants suggested 2 main contributors to positive well-being including:

- An increased understanding of themselves
- A feeling of being more in control

‘I couldn’t see a path or a way forward with the burden and overwhelm, it helped me see what I needed to achieve, I had a shift within myself, I had more control and was not so emotional, I felt like I was doing a good job’

Re-framing of negative emotions

A strong theme across all participants was the ability from the coaching sessions to re-frame negative emotions in a more helpful regulated way.

‘Focusing on my inner champion was really good for me because you don’t always notice when you’re in a downward spiral or if you’re overwhelmed. It stopped me being overwhelmed and gave me structure’



Increase in awareness

All participants reported an increase in self awareness from the coaching.

‘I’ve always thought I was quite self-aware, but I certainly think things have come up that perhaps I hadn’t appreciated before. It made me realise I needed to be less self-critical’



Increased confidence

All participants reported an increase in confidence and recounted powerful experiences of the identification and use of strengths describing them as “superpowers”

‘Strengths allowed me to stand back and see what I’m good at, see the positive and get the best out of a situation at work’

A new toolkit for inner work

Participants reported having a new toolkit and new skills they can deploy whenever they feel stuck or in a negative state of mind

'It's a tool for me, its completely changed my perspective and given me a different way of thinking about things. So instead of getting stuck in a rut of negativity and not knowing where to go, it has given me a new tool in terms of focusing on my strengths'



Future Research

Future Studies.....

- to consider a larger sample size and include male participants to explore if PPC might be a possible tool to support all employees to succeed at work and bolster their wellbeing
- To consider if PPC is more beneficial than other coaching approaches in hybrid working environments

How I plan to apply these findings in practice

- A go to coaching support package to help women in crisis situations like Covid-19 in the workplace
- Strengths based coaching as part of Positive Leadership development programmes
- Encourage a move away from traditional EAP programmes to preventative and proactive coaching programmes in the workplace that bolster well-being
- Educate and upskill HR practitioners with a new understanding around flourishing and well-being at work
- Help companies to embed well-being initiatives in the workplace
- Run in house coaching clinics to give employees the tools to flourish at home and at work

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