



# **Positive Psychological Coaching:**

## An investigation on its efficacy in the workplace

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**Positive Psychological Coaching:**

An investigation on its efficacy in the workplace

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# Positive Psychological Coaching:

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## CHAPTER 1

### General Introduction

A growing number of businesses are turning to the practice of coaching as a strategy to deal with the problems that fluctuating labour markets engender and gain competitive advantage, because organizations have to adjust and reinventing themselves to ensure their long-term existence and maintain or boost productivity. Specifically, human resources strategies and policies have a direct impact on the company's business results; therefore, it is fundamental to go beyond traditional business management, primarily reactive and focused on deficit or problem-solving, to a more proactive approach in order to stay relevant in the marketplace (Stone et al., 2020).

The implementation of an innovative organizational strategy emphasizes a positive approach that acknowledges that the mission of the organization is to achieve and enable the highest potential of employees and the organization (Malik et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Carvajal et al., 2010). Employee talent has become highly relevant since the competitiveness of an organization is directly related to its workers' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Furthermore, if the organizational environment is dynamic and chaotic, employee talent must change to meet environmental expectations. Thus, coaching becomes relevant as it provides the employee with the time, mental space, and guidance they need to make sense of the information available and apply it effectively (Jones, 2020). This methodology's primary purpose is to support people in acquiring the skills and competencies required to accomplish work objectives and to adapt to organizational and social change-related shifts (Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2020). Therefore, in today's turbulent corporate climate, coaching offers a flexible training and growth solution for personal and professional development.

#### **Background: Coaching definition**

What is coaching? In the literature, there are various definitions according to the approach and understanding of each author. Nonetheless, they all share the following characteristics: people have a natural ability to grow and develop as individuals and as

professionals; the interaction between coach (professional) and coachee (client) must be collaborative (Dyess et al., 2017; Spence & Grant, 2007; van Zyl et al., 2020) and co-active (Kimsey-House et al., 2018); and in all definitions, there are important words such as: facilitate, objectives, potentiate, and maximize. The International Coach Federation (ICF) (2021, About section, para. 5) describes coaching as: "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential". From my point of view, this is one of the most accurate and comprehensive description of the coaching process. In this definition, the hallmarks that differentiate professional coaching from other developmental practices for organizations or individuals are partnering, thought-provoking, and maximize potential. A coach's worth stems from the ability to serve as an insightful partner, co-create the relationship, communicate effectively, and guiding the clients in developing their own practical and feasible success strategies (ICF, 2022). Therefore, coaching can be seen as an efficient, methodical, and strategic form of skill training that facilitates change through the attainment of desired outcomes and professional growth (Grant & O'Connor, 2019; Bozer & Jones, 2018).

Although there are many overlapping areas, it is important to distinguish coaching from psychotherapy or counselling, and mentoring. Counselling aims to provide a solution to a problem by researching its causes, diagnosis, and potential treatment, whereas coaching's focus is prospective, goal-oriented, and there is no diagnosis since the client does not exhibit any psychopathology (Grant & Green, 2018). In mentoring, someone with seniority transmits his knowledge and advice to someone with less experience, while in coaching, the relationship is collaborative, and the agenda is developed by both parties. Rather than giving advice, the coach gathers information and guides the coachee in the process of change (Passmore & Lai, 2020).

This is interesting to notice that psychologists have traditionally focused on the study of negative characteristics of human beings, which has limited the study and understanding of the human mind. Positive Psychology (PP), defined as the scientific study of flourishing or

optimal functioning of people, and organizations (Salanova et al., 2019b; Seligman, 2012), arises as a complementary approach to traditional psychology's focus on pathology. It emphasizes positive characteristics (i.e., personal strengths), thinking patterns, behaviours, and practices that contribute to a full and meaningful life. In organizational settings, fostering challenges, development, and with it build positive traits rather than dealing with negative aspects such as weaknesses is in both employees' and modern organizations' best interests (Salanova et al., 2019b). This approach to positive organizational psychology seeks to examine the factors and processes that increase well-being and the quality of work-life (Donaldson & Ko, 2010).

Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) are scientific methods and intentional activities aimed to cultivate positive cognitions, behaviours and emotions (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009), and boost happiness and well-being (Carr et al., 2021; Keyes et al., 2012). Positive interventions at work are person-, team-, and organization-focused strategies that improve performance and health to increase work quality and organisational excellence (Salanova et al., 2013). Donaldson et al. (2019) found that the most successful positive organisational psychology interventions were those that focused on psychological capital, employees' strengths, well-being and gratitude, and job crafting. If, in addition, the intervention is based on the use of strengths, which by definition are a resource available to people that favours the achievement of the proposed goals, the result is a valuable and effective methodology that enhances the psychological resources necessary to achieve higher levels of performance and physical, emotional and social well-being (Linley et al., 2010). Up to the publication of this work, there have been two meta-analyses conducted on PPIs that included and identified coaching interventions as PPIs (Burke & Passmore, 2019; Green et al., 2006; Spence & Grant, 2007; Trom & Burke, 2021).

The focus of this dissertation is through the understanding the concept of Positive Psychological Coaching (PPC), to demonstrate its effectiveness in the workplace, hence it is relevant to highlight the psychological perspective that will accompany this work. Passmore (2010, p. 4) has defined coaching psychology as "the scientific study of behaviour, cognitive

and emotion within coaching practice to deepen our understanding and enhance our practice within coaching”. Following the definition of these concepts, past research has supported the fusion of PP and psychological coaching since both approaches focus on nurturing and cultivating optimal functioning, and embracing an individual's strengths for growth (Green, 2014; Linley & Harrington, 2005). PP applied to coaching helps the coachee to be mindful of his personal resources and creates the environment for the development of skills and capabilities outside the predefined professional tasks (Castiello D'Antonio, 2018). Therefore, PPC is a collaborative relationship between coach and coachee that focuses on identifying, nurturing, and implementing personal resources to increase positive states and facilitate personal and professional progress (van Zyl et al., 2020). Furthermore, previous research (Theeboom et al., 2014; Peláez et al., 2020) suggests that coaching can be successful even with a reduced number of coaching sessions. In a fast-paced and unpredictable society, short-term coaching (i.e., micro-coaching) could be an effective solution for organizations since it might help optimize time and expenses. The purpose of micro-coaching is to create an environment where a specific goal is attainable in a short period of time. The main differences between a standard coaching process and micro-coaching are that micro-coaching has fewer sessions and the goal is more specific and short-term (Corbu et al., 2020; Peláez et al., 2020).

PPC is a scientifically rooted technique that strives to help coachees increase well-being, foster and use strengths, improve performance and attain goals (Boniwell & Kauffman, 2018, p. 153). Following a strengths-based approach, Burke (2018) advocates using strengths in Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching (PPMC) and strengths-based coaching to assist coachees achieve their goals, which is consistent with previous statements that coaching has always focused on strengths as an instrument for personal development (Biswas-Diener, 2010). Character strengths assessment aids coaching by enhancing awareness, confidence, and personal resources to increase performance (Burke & Passmore, 2019). In this context, it is relevant to understand coachees' signature



strengths, as they can be thought of as the “active ingredients for positive living” (López et al., 2009, p. 73).

PPC embraces a holistic approach towards growth that enables clients to recognise and utilise their personal resources (i.e., strengths) along with acknowledging the circumstances that shape their experiences (Haberlin, 2019). Accordingly, the JD-R model describes how the organisational environment influences the well-being and performance of employees. The authors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) emphasised the significance of personal resources, which alleviate the negative effect of job demands and accentuate the positive effect of job resources on motivation, particularly in relation to the difficulties faced throughout the workday. Personal resources are defined as psychological aspects associated with resilience and the ability to manage and positively influence one's own environment, which aid workers in attaining their goals and foster their personal and professional development (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Personal resources such as self-efficacy, optimism, and organisational self-esteem (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007) or psychological capital (PsyCap) (hope, resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism) have been shown to play a significant role as mediators between job resources and well-being (Vink et al., 2011). Employees with high levels of PsyCap perceive fewer job demands and bring more job resources to the task (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007); as a result, they experience less fatigue and are more energised, which is directly related to engagement (Van den Broeck et al., 2008).

The interventions of this thesis are intended to enhance positive states traits and behaviours while employing a behavioural change model (i.e., RE-GROW model; Grant, 2011a, 2022) to promote the desirable patterns of conduct.

Regarding the tools and techniques utilized in the PPC process, the scientific literature demonstrates that coaches have a broad range of resources at their disposal to employ with their coachees throughout the coaching process. A systematic review by Richter et al. (2021) presented an overview of the most common techniques used in PPC: intersessional intentional activities performed by the coachee; psychometric instruments

to empirically assess underlying strengths; self-reflection to gain insight and unlock latent potential; goal setting to structure the process; and identification, use, and development of strengths through conversation during the process (without the use of a psychometric test) to enhance awareness and deliberate utilization of strengths to achieve goals.

Regarding the effectiveness of the coaching process *per se*, it has been found that the factors that most influence the effectiveness of the process are: skills of the coach (de Haan et al., 2013), coach credibility (Bozer et al., 2014), coachee self-efficacy (Corbu et al., 2020; de Haan et al., 2013; Evers et al., 2006), readiness of the coachee (Rekalde et al., 2015), goal orientation attitude (Bozer et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2016), satisfactory coach-coachee relationship (Carter et al., 2017), interpersonal attraction (de Haan et al., 2013), trust and rapport (Cox, 2012; de Haan & Gannon, 2017); feedback intervention (Nieminen et al., 2013; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza, et al., 2015). Relating to underlying mechanisms, Grover and Furnham (2016) stated that the investigation in this field is still in its infancy. However, a few exceptions are studies by Baron & Morin (2009), de Haan et al. (2013), and Sonesh, Coultas, Marlow, et al. (2015) revealing work alliance as a mediator between coaching effectiveness and coachee and coach inputs. Moreover, Rekalde et al. (2015) conducted a systematic review suggesting that the quality of the coaching relationship depends on the coach's communication skills and the ability to generate trust.

Despite the growing literature regarding coaching process, very little it is known about the impact of positive psychological coaching, and particularly strengths-based coaching, on personal resources of non-executive employees (Green and Spence, 2014; Peláez et al., 2020) such as psychological capital, and work-related outcomes (Berg & Karlsen, 2016), leadership skills, in- and extra-role performance on individual and group levels, and eudaimonic well-being, among others effects.

To contribute to this regard and provide an advance in scientific literature, this thesis presents a quantitative methodology following longitudinal quasi-experimental control trial studies to demonstrate the efficacy of PPC. Moreover, it demonstrates that micro-coaching (i.e., short-term) is a valuable methodology to improve organizational functioning.

## **Contribution to current knowledge**

Although the popularity of the concept PPC is on the rise, research on its efficacy is scarce, and this thesis represents a step forward in this regard. It is imperative to understand the variables that may influence the success of interventions based on PPC processes (i.e., strengths-based, short-term, and positive) and their impact in work-related variables in order to provide empirical evidence and highlight critical areas for improvement and development.

On the one hand, existing empirical studies in the literature emphasize the benefits and positive outcomes of coaching for both the individual and the organization (Jones et al., 2018; Peláez et al., 2020; Ramsey, 2020; Theeboom et al., 2014; Trom & Burke, 2022). However, insufficient attention has been paid to the effects of PPC and aspects that contribute to the efficacy of the process. This includes characteristics related to the coaches' skills, the coachees' capabilities and strengths, and the process itself. It is worthwhile to explore whether the structure of the coaching sessions based on the GROW model (Grant & Green, 2004; Spence & Grant, 2007) is optimal for maximizing the process; the impact of powerful questions; and the so-called Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound (SMART) model (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2016) used to define the coaching goal.

On the other hand, research on the effectiveness of coaching lacks essential psychometric properties for robust investigations, such as a small sample size of participants or the absence of a control group. Several authors (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Theeboom et al., 2014; Vella-Brodrick, 2021) emphasize the importance of conducting rigorous empirical studies to demonstrate the value of workplace coaching through the implementation of interventions with theoretical, scientific and empirical foundation. Moreover, using robust measures, detailed coaching design, and transparent data analysis and presentation (Wang et al., 2021) is crucial to provide an adequate framework of the study. The findings and interpretations of studies with inadequate methodological design may be inaccurate and overstated (Grover & Furnham, 2016; Van Zyl & Rothmann, 2022). Additionally, it remains unclear which psychological mechanisms actually facilitate the

change during positive psychological coaching (Grover & Furnham, 2016). The research examining the connection between PPC and work-related outcomes is still in its early stage. Moreover, comprehensive and integrated reviews of empirical studies on the efficacy of PPC are scarce.

**This research aims** to provide clarity on the concept and methodology of PPC, as well as evidence of its effectiveness at the individual level through an investigation of variables that could contribute to the achievement of positive results through coaching practice. Specifically, we will examine the comparison between pre, post, and follow-up evaluations with regard to the coachees' psychological capital, performance, positive leadership skills, and well-being in the organization, the importance of goal setting in the first sessions by extending the SMART model to SMART+ (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound, and positive objective), and the role of goal-related self-efficacy to achieve positive PPC outcomes. Overall, throughout this doctoral thesis, we intend to evaluate the effectiveness of PPC as positive intervention in order to develop healthy and resilient organizations.

### **Research challenges**

To address gaps in the scientific literature of PPC in organizational settings, this thesis attempts to answer several research questions that will serve as a basic framework for the primary objectives of the dissertation.

***CHALLENGE 1: Can Positive Psychological Coaching enhance workers' personal resources?***

In the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) claimed that personal resources development is an effective method to enhance psychological well-being at work. Personal resources are malleable beliefs regarding the degree to which they have control over their environment. The authors propose that personal resources have a direct positive effect on the motivational process. In addition, personal resources are likely to mitigate the adverse effect of job demands on strain, and boost the positive effect of

(challenge) job demands on motivation that helps to be goal-oriented and focused on the work tasks. When we complete activities to achieve work-related goals, we engage in a variety of personal resources that result in excellent performance, which contributes to our well-being through the increase of positive emotions, job and life satisfaction, and fosters a sense of purpose and achievement (Luthans et al., 2015; Seligman, 2012). The personal resources that we employ in our daily tasks vary in terms of their durability throughout time and can be categorized along a continuum based on their degree of stability (Luthans et al., 2015). Thus, at one end of the spectrum are positive emotions, which are ephemeral sensations strongly tied to passing events. On the opposite end of the spectrum are features that are more stable and difficult to change, such as personality traits and intelligence. Those falling in the middle of the continuum (i.e., those resources that are close to traits but more malleable or close to states but less dependent on a single event) are of particular interest to and valuable to organizations.

In scenarios of instability and unpredictability, PsyCap complements human capital (i.e., the individuals' technical knowledge and abilities within an organization), and the social capital (i.e., the network of personal and professional ties of the organization's members). Therefore, PsyCap is a capital addition to an organization's intangible assets, offering a competitive edge through an irreplaceable strategic resource capable of having transcendental implications for the organization (Luthans et al., 2007). Due to its degree of stability and malleability, PsyCap is distinguished from other personal resources by its great capacity for development (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Several publications have demonstrated that psychological capital can be developed through a 1–4-hour workshop called "PCI" (Psychological Capital Intervention), with a portion of the increase obtained remaining active even one month after the intervention (Dello Russo & Stoykova, 2015).

Previous research demonstrates that coaching cultivates this psychological resource (Petersen, 2015). Although, research has been conducted on the impact of coaching on each of the dimensions individually, such as resilience (Grant, 2013a; Sherlock-Storey et al., 2013; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016), hope (Green et al., 2006; Madden et al., 2011), and self-

efficacy (Evers et al., 2006; Baron & Morin, 2009; McDowall & Butterworth, 2014), to our knowledge, no workplace coaching, and particularly PPC, studies have examined the link between the PsyCap concept as a whole and coaching (Hsu et al., 2019). Moreover, there is still a lack of scientific knowledge on the influence of PPMC on PsyCap.

**CHALLENGE 2:** *Do Positive Psychological Coaching interventions have a positive impact on work-related constructs such as leadership skills, in- and extra-role performance, and well-being?*

It is commonly acknowledged that leadership contributes significantly to foster organizational health and well-being (Peiró & Rodríguez, 2008; Rosenbach et al., 2018; Salanova et al., 2019b). Therefore, an effective method to gain a competitive edge on the marketplace is to develop strategies focused on leadership interventions aimed to improve executives' skills and behaviours that will benefit both individuals and organizations (Anthony, 2017; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Gray, 2006). Executive coaching is becoming a popular way to develop executives (Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2020), especially, strengths-based leadership coaching, as it aligns with leadership abilities and corporate goals (MacKie, 2014). Leaders' participation in coaching processes is beneficial not just for their own well-being (Gabriel et al., 2014; Jarosz, 2021) improvement of leadership abilities and performance (MacKie, 2014; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020; Theeboom et al., 2014), but also for their employees' well-being, behaviour, and performance.

Despite the growing number of evidence on the effects of executive coaching on leadership styles, well-being, and performance (Ballesteros-Sánchez et al., 2019; MacKie, 2014), there is still a need for further research on the impact of PPC, and specifically strengths-based coaching, on positive leadership styles and its impact on well-being and performance of leaders and their teams. In addition, there is a dearth of research regarding the design of coaching interventions, which this study attempts to address.

**CHALLENGE 3: *Is Positive Psychological Coaching an effective workplace intervention?***

In view of the growing interest in workplace coaching in the field of human resources, it is necessary to explore the antecedents, consequences, and underlying mechanisms that the literature highlights as most relevant in order to offer individuals and organizations a comprehensive, professional, and evidence-based service. A systematic review focused on examining this variable allows researchers to detect literature gaps on methodology, study design, need for further investigation on specific variables, and call for future investigations to address those limitations. Previous research has been focused on workplace coaching effectiveness (for systematic reviews, see Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Theeboom et al., 2014). Nevertheless, there is still a need to examine the antecedents, underlying mechanisms and outcomes that lead to PPC's effectiveness in organizational environments. The present project intends to extend this line of research to advance in the PPC development, as well as to comprehend and demonstrate its value and function in the organizational context.

**Outline of the dissertation**

This thesis seeks to contribute to the growing body of PPC literature by investigating the influence of PPC interventions on individuals' personal resources, leadership skills, well-being, and performance within the organizational context. The aforesaid challenges are elaborated in further detail in each chapter of this dissertation. Two empirical studies exploring the effects of PPMC intervention on working settings are presented in Chapters 2 and 3, followed by a systematic review of the antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and outcomes of PPC in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes by summarizing the topic and main findings, discussing its practical and theoretical implications, as well as outlining future study directions. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the challenges addressed in each chapter.

**Table 1**

*Overview of research challenges addressed throughout the chapters of the dissertation*

		Chapters		
		2	3	4
Challenge 1	Efficacy for personal resources improvement.	x		
Challenge 2	Impact on work-related constructs (i.e., leadership skills).	x	x	
Challenge 3	PPMC's effectiveness in organizational settings.			x

### ***Chapter 2: Positive Psychology Micro-Coaching Intervention: Effects on***

#### ***Psychological Capital and Goal-Related Self-Efficacy***

This chapter focuses on examining the effects of a PPMC program on non-executive employees' psychological capital, and to analyse the influence of goal-related self-efficacy on goal attainment during the coaching process. Sixty participants from an automotive industry business engaged in a PPMC program for five weeks (35 in the experimental group and 25 in the waiting-list control group), distributed on a group session, three individual coaching sessions, and individual monitoring between sessions. The study follows longitudinal design with pre-, post-, and 4-month follow-up measures to determine the effect on the research variables. Statistical analyses were performed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a 2x2 design to study differences between-subjects factor (group: EX and WL), and within-subjects factor (time: T1; T2); *t*-tests of related samples to compare Pre and Post times, and Pre and FUP times considering the whole intervention group (EXGr and WLGr); and simple linear regression to evaluate the specific link between research variables (goal-related self-efficacy) at Pre time, and the outcome variables (goal attainment) at Post time. With this study it is expected that the intervention program will increase the participants' levels of psychological capital, and that goal-related self-efficacy will predict goal achievement throughout the micro-coaching process.



### ***Chapter 3: Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching to enhance Positive Leadership, Well-being and Performance: A controlled study***

This chapter is an empirical study that aims to examine the effectiveness of a Strengths-based Leadership Coaching program in improving leaders' positive leadership skills, employees' eudaimonic well-being, and job performance (in- and extra-role) at the individual and team levels. Using a controlled trial design, a group of 60 executives (12 in the experimental group and 9 in the waiting-list control group) from an automotive industry business participated in a Strengths-Based Leadership Coaching program over the course of four months. In this study, the coaching sessions format was based on a strengths-based approach and the RE-GROW paradigm (Grant, 2003; 2011a). The program included a two-hour interactive group session followed by three individual micro-coaching sessions lasting 90 minutes each. During the research period, participants (N = 21 leaders) and their employees (N = 121) participated in a pre-post evaluation. It is expected for the intervention to increase participants' positive leadership skills and in- and extra- role performance, as well as the well-being and job performance (in- and extra-role) of their team members on both individual and team levels.

### ***Chapter 4: Effectiveness of the Positive Psychological Coaching: A Systematic Review***

This chapter is a systematic review aimed at analysing the antecedents, outcomes and underlying mechanisms leading to the effectiveness of positive psychological coaching. Four databases were consulted to address studies aligned with the objective of the review, and 15 empirical studies focused on the aforementioned variables were analysed. The review offers an overview of PPC effectiveness in organizational settings. This review stresses areas of improvement in the practice of PPC, and a detailed future research agenda that represents the research challenges presented by the thesis.

### ***Chapter 5: General Conclusions***

Finally, this chapter highlights the most relevant findings, conclusions, and contributions from the previous chapters of this thesis. Furthermore, the main practical implications are discussed together with studies and future directions for research on the PPC field.

## CHAPTER 2

### Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching Intervention: Effects on Psychological Capital and Goal-related Self-efficacy<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

Positive Psychological Coaching is receiving increasing attention within the organizational field because of its potential benefits for employees' development and well-being (Passmore & Oades, 2014). The main aim of this study was to test the impact of a Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching program on non-executive workers' psychological capital, and analyse how goal-related self-efficacy predicts goal attainment during the coaching process. Following a control trial design, 60 non-executive employees (35 in the experimental group and 25 in the waiting-list control group) from an automotive industry company participated in a Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching program over a period of five weeks. The intervention was grounded in the strengths-based approach and focused on setting a specific goal for personal and professional growth. The program consisted of a group session, three individual coaching sessions, and individual inter-session monitoring. Pre, post, and four-month follow up measurements were taken to assess the impact on the study variables. Our results reveal that psychological capital increased significantly at post and follow-up times compared to baseline levels. In addition, results confirmed that goal-related self-efficacy predicted goal attainment during the micro-coaching process. Practical implications suggest that short-term positive psychological coaching is a valuable method for developing personal resources such as psychological capital and to facilitate goal achievement in non-executive employees, in order to reach work-related goals.

*Keywords:* positive psychology coaching, goal-related self-efficacy, psychological capital, goal attainment, short-term coaching, control trial, strengths-based intervention

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More than ever, organizations must deal with a highly competitive environment where changes occur at an overwhelming speed, transforming the way they work and function, and requiring employees to learn new skills and expertise in order to execute their task effectively. Accepting negative situations such as unpredictable environment or emotional complexity of human nature, can lead to the development of different strategies for dealing with them (Wong, 2020). In order to achieve success, organizational change has become a necessity. The efficacy of any change effort relies on the employees' attitude and readiness for change (Madsen et al., 2005). Therefore, it is important to empower employees by increasing their personal resources (i.e., self-efficacy) (Emsza et al., 2016) in order to prepare them to deal with organizational changes. There are different mechanisms used by individuals to handle challenging circumstances such as techniques that help to control thoughts, emotions and behaviours (i.e., coping strategies) before, during and after difficulties (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Emerging research demonstrates that coaching is a valuable tool for organizations during turbulence because it helps to improve skills and attitudes for suitable change management and achieve work demands and goals (Bickerich et al., 2018; Grant, 2014; Kombarakaran et al., 2008). More recently, the increasing recognition that wellbeing plays a significant role in organizational performance has resulted in coaching becoming more holistic and focusing more on the health and wellbeing of employees (Green & Palmer, 2018).

As Walsh et al. (2018) reported, happy people tend to be more successful in different areas of life. One's happiness takes place not only when confronting the negative existential anxieties, but also as a result of focusing on the positive and developing positive resources (Wong, 2016). Therefore, higher levels of wellbeing-related positive psychological resources, such as optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and hope, increase the probability of successfully facing organizational challenges. Taken together, these positive psychological resources build psychological capital (PsyCap), a psychological construct described as a state rather than a trait (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017) that can be developed, modified, and learned. Positive psychological coaching is an ideal methodology for building this positive

construct because it offers an environment and characteristics that facilitate the learning process (Petersen, 2015). Similarly, goal-related self-efficacy (Grant & Green, 2004) and goal attainment (Green & Spence, 2014) are other crucial factors that contribute to organizational success and can be worked on via positive psychological coaching (Palmer & Whybrow, 2005).

Accelerated advances at the legislative, technological, cultural, and economic levels have also influenced the automotive market. Addressing new challenges such as product diversification, competition, and customer expectations requires higher levels of efficiency and resilience (Ivanov et al., 2018). Organizational flexibility has become a competitive advantage, and its development is related to the employees' ability to adjust to a volatile environment, which in turn determines the organization's success (Mendes & Machado, 2015). Organizations should focus on the employees' personal resources to achieve excellent organizational results (Van Wingerden et al., 2017). Therefore, coaching is suggested as a successful solution to promote resource development and, hence, reach high performance levels (Bodein et al., 2013).

Although there is research on the impact of executive coaching on wellbeing-related abilities and goal achievement in organizational environments (Grant, 2013a, 2014, 2017a), empirical studies that investigate these variables in non-executive employees or workplace coaching are still limited. A significant number of organizations implement coaching in a variety of formats and contexts, apart from conventional executive coaching provided by an external coach to a client who has managerial authority (International Coach Federation, 2016). In this study, we use workplace coaching as a more comprehensive concept that integrates coaching provided to all levels of employees (specifically non-executive employees) in a work environment, in order to improve work performance and job-related skills (Grant, 2013a). Therefore, scientific studies on the impact of positive psychological coaching, and particularly strengths-based coaching, on personal resources of non-executive employees (Green & Spence, 2014; Peláez et al., 2020) make an important contribution to the literature. Considering that positive psychological coaching aims to seek

solutions rather than focusing on problems (Biswas-Diener, 2010; Green & Palmer, 2018), two main indicators of its effectiveness are goal attainment (Grant et al., 2009; Grant, et al., 2010; Minzlaff, 2019) and specific self-efficacy to accomplish goals (de Haan et al., 2016; Moen & Allgood, 2009). Thus, studying the influence of goal-related self-efficacy represents a step forward in further understanding the role of personal resources in the effectiveness of the coaching process.

To address this gap, a controlled design study is presented in order to provide scientific evidence about the effect of a Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching (PPMC; i.e., short-term and strengths-based) intervention on the PsyCap of non-executive workers and the relationship between goal attainment and goal-related self-efficacy. Our proposal is based on previous research indicating the effectiveness of PPMC in improving personal resources, well-being and performance, and that the coaching process is effective even with fewer sessions (i.e., micro-coaching) (Peláez et al., 2020; Theeboom et al., 2013).

### **Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching**

In the last decade, research on Positive Psychology arises to provide an evidence-based knowledge of human flourishing by studying the optimal functioning of people and organizations, focusing on their strengths and positive characteristics (Salanova et al., 2019b). Based on its existential-humanistic roots, Positive Psychology broadens its definition by integrating both negative and positive aspects of the human condition in order to grow and flourish (Wong, 2016). The way to cultivate positive emotions, cognitions and behaviours is through positive psychology interventions (PPI). These interventions are designed to enhance: (1) positive aspects, (2) person-activity adjustment, (3) abilities of the individuals involved, and (4) the mechanisms of positive activities aimed at improving well-being (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). The purpose of this approach, unlike traditional psychology, is to focus on positive experiences, factors and scenarios (Parks & Biswas-Diener, 2013). Previous research (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016; Wong, 2020) argued that this point of view ignores the balance between positive and negative experiences, and suggest that

“the most promising strategy to accomplish the mission of positive psychology is to confront the dark side of human existence and understand the unique experience and expression of wellbeing” (Wong, 2020, p. 3). In view of the world’s uncertainty and challenge, handling and overcoming life’s adversities is necessary to strengthen, and, even positively transform one’s personal resources.

An approach to strengths developed by Linley (2008) suggests that strengths consist of the ability to think, feel, and behave in ways that allow full and optimal functioning in the pursuit of desirable and valuable results (Linley & Harrington, 2006). In the workplace environment, employees who make a deliberate effort to apply strengths on their daily work are more productive, successful and happy (Miglianico et al., 2020).

Recently, an applied sub-discipline of psychology named Coaching Psychology has emerged and can be understood as a learning process tailored to the coachees’ specific needs that strengthens their natural capacity for growth (Gallwey, 2014). A collaborative (Green & Spence, 2014; Spence & Grant, 2007), reflective, and goal-centered relationship is required to accomplish the desired outcomes (Smither, 2011). In order to optimize time and costs, the short-term coaching process could be a useful intervention for the organizations as the society change in a fast-paced, constant and unpredictable way. Micro-coaching attempt to create an ambiance where the goal is specific and viable to achieve in a short-term. The main differences between a standard coaching process and micro-coaching resides in the definition of a specific and short-term feasible goal and in fewer number of sessions in micro-coaching (Peláez et al., 2020).

Build on the definitions of these terms, previous research suggested the integration of positive psychology and psychological coaching because both approaches focus on developing optimal functioning and utilizing individuals’ strengths for improvement (Green, 2014; Linley & Harrington, 2005). Based on this approach, the concept of positive psychological coaching emerges as a technique that uses positive psychology principles to provide a "positive diagnosis" (Biswas-Diener, 2009). Positive psychology applied to coaching allows the coachee to be conscious of his personal resources, and provides the

conditions for the development of skills and abilities beyond the usual or prescribed professional roles (Castiello D'Antonio, 2018). Van Zyl et al., (2020) propose a definition of positive psychological coaching based on positive psychological evidence-based approaches that describes a collaborative relationship between coach and coachee focused on discovering, cultivating, and applying personal resources to enhance positive states and facilitate personal/professional growth. In general, coaching has always focused on strengths because of their explicit use as tools for personal development (Biswas-Diener, 2010). Burke (2018) suggests that the use of strengths in the PPMC, and particularly in strengths-based coaching, is a key element in finding solutions to help coachees achieve their goals. Additionally, the assessment of character strengths benefits the coaching process by creating awareness, increasing confidence, and developing personal resources to improve performance (Burke & Passmore, 2019). Positive psychological coaching is a powerful methodology because it promotes positive psychological interactions, helps employees to develop positive psychological resources, and increases productivity (Biswas-Diener, 2010).

Some interventions indicate that the use of personal resources for personal and professional success is an efficient organizational strategy to promote beneficial outcomes. For example, Meyers and van Woerkom (2017) observed that a brief strengths intervention increased employees' positive affect and PsyCap by identifying and developing strengths and their use in the work context.

In recent years, research in the field of psychological coaching has experienced significant growth at the level of organizational research and practice. Several meta-analyses and studies highlight the effectiveness of coaching (Bozer & Jones; 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Lai & McDowall, 2014; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza, et al., 2015; Theeboom et al., 2013). Currently, a growing number of professionals are using positive intervention strategies because they are linked to increased psychological resources, such as self-efficacy (Proctor et al., 2011) and the achievement of personal and organizational goals (Linley et al., 2010).



Furthermore, although there is empirical evidence about the influence of executive coaching on work-related outcomes, such as leadership skills (MacKie, 2014), findings on the effects of coaching on non-executive workers are still limited (Grant, 2013a). However, recent research has focused on applying the strengths-based coaching methodology to non-executive positions, analysing the effectiveness of strength-based coaching in promoting wellbeing (i.e., work engagement) and job performance (Peláez et al., 2020). Nevertheless, more studies with controlled and longitudinal designs are needed to broaden and build on the effects of PPMC on work-related outcomes, such as PsyCap, and the role of self-efficacy in achieving goals during the process, considering the key role of these variables in a coaching process. In order to respond to these requests, this study aims to contribute to the research on the impact of a PPMC program on PsyCap and the relationship between self-efficacy and goal attainment in the coaching process. In the organizational context, the use of a strengths-based approach is a valuable tool to promote personal resource development and individuals' optimum functioning to achieve goals. (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007; Green & Spence, 2014).

### **Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching and Psychological Capital**

Luthans et al. (2007) define PsyCap as

An individual's positive psychological state of development, characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success. (p. 3)

This approach is based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2002), which posits that individuals seek to obtain, retain, and protect personal resources in order to control and impact their environment effectively. PsyCap is described as a positive

interpretation of events that stimulates flourishing and success based on effort and constancy. According to Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2013), the mechanisms through which PsyCap works focus on: (1) the intentionality and motivation for behaviour; (2) positive cognitive assessments through which negative situations are reevaluated more positively; (3) positive emotions that facilitate the construction and restoration of weakened psychological resources, including the dimensions of PsyCap; and (4) social mechanisms that help in the development of personal resources. The concept extends to organizations and represents a competitive advantage because it is difficult to replicate. A study by Luthans et al. (2007) shows that the four dimensions of PsyCap together are a better predictor of job performance and satisfaction than the four facets individually.

Improving PsyCap leads to greater organizational commitment, more favorable organizational citizenship behaviour, less absenteeism, greater job satisfaction (Idris & Manganaro, 2017), and greater psychological wellbeing (Avey et al., 2011). Additionally, longitudinal studies show that PsyCap is a state-like construct, i.e., flexible and open to development (Avey et al., 2010, Peterson et al., 2011), and can be developed through short interventions (Dello Russo et al., 2015; Demerouti et al., 2011, Ertosun et al., 2015; Luthans et al., 2006). In order to carry out effective PsyCap interventions, it is important to take into account the organizational climate context because it seeks to promote positive thinking patterns. This transformation requires an organizational climate that promotes empowerment, support, and recognition (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). PsyCap becomes relevant in the organizational context because high levels of its four dimensions make it possible to face adversities in organizational dynamics. Previous literature suggests that coaching offers the necessary conditions to cultivate this positive psychological resource (Petersen, 2015).

Whereas research has focused on the impact of coaching on each of the dimensions separately, such as resilience (Grant, 2013a; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016; Sherlock-Storey et al., 2013), hope (Green et al., 2006; Madden et al., 2011), and self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2009; Evers et al., 2006; McDowall & Butterworth, 2014), no workplace coaching studies

have focused on the four dimensions of the PsyCap construct as a whole and their relationship with coaching (Hsu et al., 2019). Additionally, scientific evidence on the impact of PPMC on PsyCap is still missing, which is a new challenge and a novelty of this study. In addition, due to the lack of longitudinal studies that evaluate the maintenance of the results obtained in the coaching process over time (Grant & O'Connor, 2018), it is necessary to evaluate and verify the durability of the positive effects produced on PsyCap.

**Hypothesis 1:** Participants will increase their levels of PsyCap in Post time (after the intervention) for the Experimental group (EX) compared to Pre time (before the intervention), and compared to a Waiting List-control group (WL). Additionally, participants will report higher scores on PsyCap in Post time and four months after finishing the intervention (four-month follow-up; FUP) compared to Pre time (before the intervention), and considering the whole intervention group.

### **Goal-related Self-efficacy and Goal Attainment in PPMC**

Goals, as defined by Latham & Locke (2002, p. 705) are “the object or aim of an action, for example, to attain a specific standard of proficiency, usually within a specified time limit”. In other words, is the conscious intentionality that an individual does in order to achieve to desired results. Goal setting is the mechanism whereby the person reaches these goals. According to goal setting theory, difficult and specific goals lead to higher levels of performance as direct both attention and action (Locke & Latham, 2006). If the development of successful goals is perceived, individuals 's confidence in their own capabilities enhances their ability to progress. Combined with self-efficacy, goal achievement leads individuals to set new, demanding goals (Schunk, 1990). This theory seems to fit properly in coaching literature because of the future-focused nature of goals and coaching, the key role of goal attainment in coaching, and the useful framework for coaching models provided by the goal setting theory, such as Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound (SMART) (Clutterbuck & Spence, 2016).

By definition, coaching is a technique for learning and achieving goals by designing an action plan (Grant, 2013b). Goal attainment is an important indicator of the success of the process, according to the theory of coaching. The research finds coaching to be an effective method to achieve goals because it increases motivation, positive affect, and self-efficacy, and it facilitates goal progression (Grant, 2012; Grant & O'Connor, 2010). Specifically, strengths-based solutions reinforce individuals' resilience skills and abilities and their use in achieving goals and making significant positive changes (Grant, 2011b). This perspective argues that coaches should spend most of the time posing inquiries that elicit the coachees' thoughts about the best way to achieve their goals, rather than asking "why" questions that explore causality. By defining the different types of goals and their relevance in the clients' transformation process, coaches can encourage their customers to gain insight and improve habits that enhance their job performance and, more importantly, their personal wellbeing and sense of self (Grant, 2019).

Bandura (1997) defined perceived self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Research suggests that people with higher levels of self-efficacy have stronger beliefs in their task-related capacities and their ability to set more ambitious goals and pursue them than people with lower levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Coachee self-efficacy has been found to be a key antecedent of coaching outcomes such as perceived coaching effectiveness (de Haan et al., 2013) and performance (Bozer et al., 2013). Considering the important role of behavioral and cognitive mechanisms in coaching, such as feedback, planning, and goal setting, and their connection to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), coachee self-efficacy is viewed as a central psychological factor in the process. Self-efficacy can be considered a generalized construct or a domain-specific variable to predict behaviour and outcomes (Maddux, 2016). According to Bandura (1997) the more specific is self-efficacy, the greater prediction of successful behaviour. We contend that the goal attainability construct can be better understood by taking into consideration the effects of goal-related self-efficacy in successfully fulfilling the tasks involved in the coaching process in order to

reach goals. Evers et al. (2006) demonstrated that self-efficacy in setting goals has a positive impact on the client's perceptions of coaching's effectiveness. Given the relationship between these two concepts, specific self-efficacy for achieving goals will lead to greater progress in goal attainment.

Past research has proposed that workplace coaching has a positive impact on positive aspects such as goal attainment (Grant, 2014), self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2009), and wellbeing (Theeboom et al., 2013). However, research on the effectiveness of a strengths-based micro-coaching intervention and its impact on these variables is still in its infancy (Peláez et al., 2020), and there is still a need for evidence-based research that considers specific self-efficacy as a predictor of goal attainment in PPMC. Moreover, there is a request in the scientific literature to relate goal-related self-efficacy and coaching outcomes (i.e., goal attainment; Bozer & Jones, 2018). In order to address this gap, we formulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** Goal-related self-efficacy will predict goal attainment in the PPMC process.

## Method

### Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from a multinational automotive industry company located in Spain, with 7561 employees. Seventy-six employees who hold technical and engineering positions with non-supervisory or non-executive functions received an invitation to participate in a short-term strengths-based micro-coaching program. Finally, a total of 60 participants (79%) were involved in this research project: 35 participants divided into six groups that took part simultaneously and made up the experimental condition (EX group), and 25 participants divided into three groups that made up the waiting-list condition (WL group) as untreated comparisons in the study. Participants' mean age was 36 years ( $SD = 7.5$ ), and 70% were male. Furthermore, 82% of participants had a tenured contract, and the average length of time working in the company was 8.6 years ( $SD = 8.5$ ).

Participation was completely voluntary, and there was no extra financial incentive for their participation. All participants gave their written informed consent to release their personal data for scientific research purposes.

A degree of attrition was expected due to the longitudinal design of this study and the company's casuistry. Due to unforeseen work-related and personal events, four employees did not complete the intervention program. Therefore, a total of 56 (93%) participants completed the program and responded to a post-intervention questionnaire, and 52 (87%) responded to the FUP questionnaire. For managerial reasons, the WL groups initiated the intervention shortly after the EX groups finished the coaching sessions (after the T2 evaluation), instead of waiting until the completion of the FUP questionnaires.

### **Program Description and Procedure**

The intervention was called the "Strengths-based micro-coaching program", and it was designed for different purposes: (1) to present and provide feedback on the results of self-assessments of participants' positive psychological resources (i.e., hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy), wellbeing variables (i.e., work engagement), and healthy organizational outcomes (i.e., performance); and (2) to facilitate goal attainment by establishing an action plan based on the use of personal strengths.

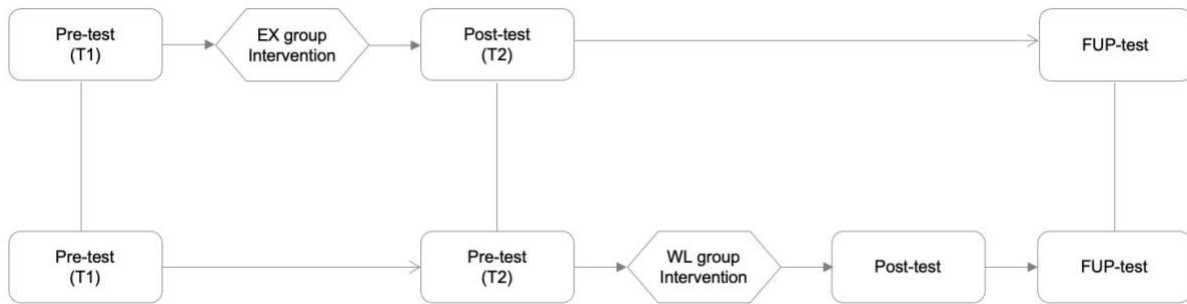
In a previous study (Peláez et al., 2020), the authors explored the impact of this particular intervention program on work engagement and job performance. Thus, these two outcome variables were not included in the present study. This previous intervention program was extended over the course of six weeks and divided into a two-hour group session and three individual coaching sessions. The intervention was delivered by four professional psychologists external to the organization with specific coaching and positive psychology expertise. They also participated in two group supervision sessions (one at the beginning and the second one in the middle of the process) with an experienced professional in this subject. All four coaches had to follow a guideline (i.e., protocol) in order to obtain uniform, and comparable information regarding the main issues on the coaching

process. Moreover, each coach had to register the relevant points of the session based on the protocol. This procedure ensured that the results were based on the same approach.

The present study is related to the Peláez et al. (2020) study and has the same design and sample. We attempt to analyse the effectiveness of a PPMC program in increasing work-related variables (i.e., PsyCap), study the relationship between goal-related self-efficacy and goal attainment, and provide further evidence reinforcing its value and validity.

To manage this intervention, researchers were assisted by the manager of the plant in order to identify employees' need to respond to high levels of job demands and reach higher performance goals. During the first phase of this project, employees were informed about the characteristics of the study, the evaluation procedure, the purpose of the intervention, and the confidentiality of their responses, according to the European data regulation standards. Furthermore, the research adhered to ethical principles and standards approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University. Participants were not randomly allocated to either the EX group or the WL group because their assignment depended on their availability the preferences of the organization, and coaches' schedule. The participants could choose between the two groups through registering in a template sheet.

The study used a within-subjects (pre-post-FUP) and between-subjects (EX-WL) design. Participants were assessed at Time 1 (T1; before the intervention), Time 2 (T2; immediately after the intervention for the EX group, and before the intervention for the WL group), Post times (after the intervention for the whole intervention group, once the WL group has finished the intervention) and follow-up times (FUP; four months after finishing the intervention for the whole intervention group). The self-reported questionnaires were administrated online by sending an email with a direct link to each participant at all four assessment times. Next, participants in the experimental group started the two-hour group session, followed by three micro-coaching sessions. Figure 1 represents the outline research of the study.

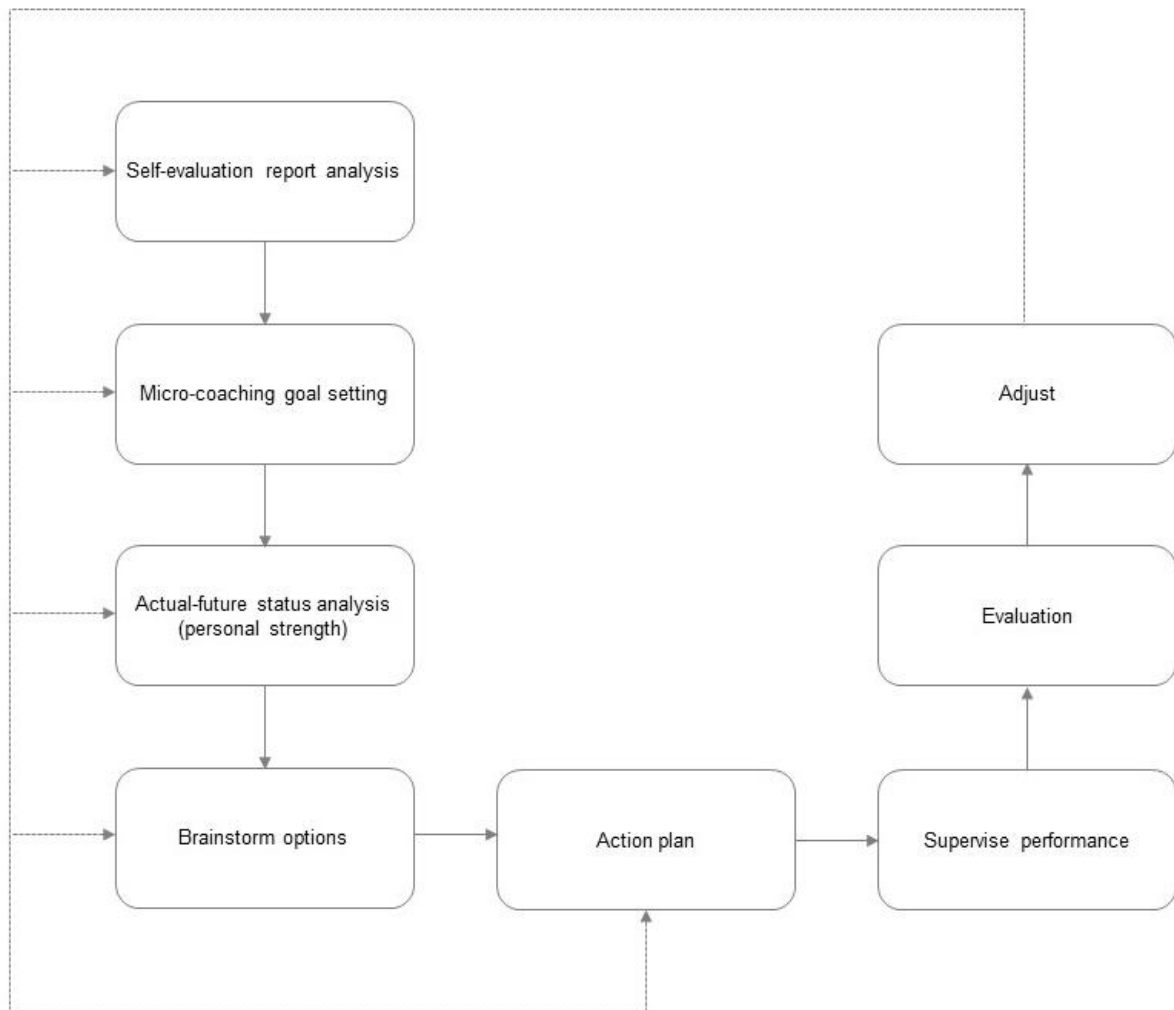


**Figure 1**

*Experimental design of the study. EX: experimental group; WL: waiting list-control group; Pre-test: pre-assessment; Post-test: post-assessment; FUP-test: follow up-assessment; T1: time 1; T2: time 2.*

The coaching sessions were grounded in Grant's RE-GROW model (Review, Evaluate, Goal, Reality, Options, and Wrap up) (Grant, 2011a) and the strengths-based approach (Linley & Harrington, 2006). Hence, the focus of the intervention was to set a specific goal for personal and professional growth, analyse the current-future status of the goal, brainstorm ways to achieve individual goals, establish an action plan, initiate action and implement the best options, supervise performance, evaluate progress between coaching sessions, and adjust actions if necessary (based on evaluation of progress). Following this approach, a self-regulatory cycle takes place that links outcomes from the previous session to the current session as the guiding thread in this micro-coaching process. Participants were guided by the coach through the different steps during the entire program. In addition, this model is expanded in the study with a previous step of a self-assessment report and analysis (see Fig. 2).





**Figure 2**

*Intervention program model based on the RE-GROW model (Grant, 2011a)*

During the group workshop session (i.e., the first session), participants received a short theoretical presentation on positive psychology, positive psychological coaching, and the variables assessed in the study. Next, the participants received an individual report and feedback on their self-assessment, providing a starting point and enhancing awareness of their personal resources, wellbeing, and performance. Following the structure, each coachee established a specific goal to focus on, and a working guide was offered that included a workbook, information, and instructions for coaching activities and a bibliography.

The program continued with two weekly 90-minute individual micro-coaching sessions that mainly consisted of reporting the levels of goal-related self-efficacy, defining the goal and the action plan for achieving it. Throughout the intervention, the participants used their character strengths to reach the established goal. Specifically, in the “R” of the GROW model, the current status and personal strengths available to reach the desired status (goal) were identified, followed by a reflection on participants’ abilities, improvement areas, and external opportunities. Afterwards, the individuals developed and initiated an action plan. Between sessions, participants worked on developing the plan. In each session, the coach helped the coachee to evaluate and adjust the goal or actions in order to obtain better results.

Finally, two weeks after finishing the two 90-min sessions, the participants attended a 60-minute final follow-up session to monitor the action plan, celebrate the positive results and the accomplishment of the goal, and provide feedback on the program. To ensure transference of training back to their daily work, throughout this session, the "Best Possible Self" technique, developed by Laura King (2001),<sup>1</sup> was performed as a closing task, accompanied by visualization techniques based on their signature strengths. Participants were asked to picture themselves in the best possible future situation taking into account three specific areas (personal, professional, and social). Peters et al. (2010) found that this exercise was useful for improving personal and psychological wellbeing. In this intervention, this exercise was adapted to the individual coachee micro-coaching process and specific strengths used in the PPMC, encouraging participants to write down and then visualize the journey to achieve the goal using their personal resources. Table 1 summarizes the PPMC intervention program.

Table 1

*Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching sessions framework*

Session	Main purpose	Activities/tasks	Homework
1	Connecting and sharing. Pre-assessment results: feedback and reflection. Goal setting. Workbook delivery.	Welcome: coaches' presentation and objectives, structure and internal rules of the program. Ice-breaker: participants' self-presentation through symbols. Positive Psychology inputs. Presentation of the variables assessed and delivery of the results. Goal setting using SMART+ technique: role-playing in pair.	Brief survey to think about the gap between current and desired situation (i.e., How do you define success in your life at this moment? When are you at your best? What are your personal strengths?)
2	Process development following the GROW model: GOAL setting (SMART+), examine the REALITY, explore OPTIONS and establish the WILL	Review session 1: potential areas uncovered (SMART+ goal). <b>Reality:</b> identifying and reflecting about personal strengths and weaknesses (symbol identification, strengths map, SOWT analysis). <b>Options:</b> brainstorming, and analysis of advantages and disadvantages. <b>Action plan:</b> detailed description regarding the what, why, when, how and who questions.	"Time line" exercise: steps to follow for the action plan. Start the action plan.
3	Follow-up the action plan:	Review session 2: contents and doubts. Activity: "Time line" adapted to the action plan. Reflection about the achievements so far and future actions. Activity: (written and visualized) "The Best Possible Self" exercise.	Practice and follow the plan.
4	Closing, review, and reflection	Process overview Review session 3: topics, action plan, and doubts. Coachees' feedback: on the process, and coaches' performance.	

## **Measures**

### ***Psychological Capital***

Psychological capital was measured with the adapted version (Azanza et al., 2014) of the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ; Luthans et al., 2007). The questionnaire consists of 12 items distributed in four factors: (1) self-efficacy (3 items; example item: "I feel confident in representing my work area in meetings with management."); (2) hope (4 items; example item: "I can think of many ways to reach my current work goals."); (3) optimism (2 items; example item: "I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job."); and (4) resilience (3 items; example item: "I can get through difficult times at work because I've experienced difficulty before."). The PCQ items were rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 6 ("strongly agree"). Based on the reliability test, PCQ obtained a coefficient of 0.809 for T1, 0.88 for T2, and 0.83 for T3 for the alpha Cronbach value, which means that this questionnaire can measure psychological capital consistently.

### ***Goal-related Self-efficacy***

Following Bandura's (2006) guide for constructing self-efficacy scales, participants were asked during the first session to rate the degree of confidence to successfully achieve their goals, using a ten-point rating scale ranging from 0 ("cannot do"); through intermediate degrees of assurance, 5 ("moderately certain can do"); to complete assurance, 10 ("highly certain can do"). Although single-item measures are often avoided in research due to concerns about their psychometric properties, the challenge of applying research in practical contexts such as the workplace has led to an examination of their suitability when circumstances require very brief scales that restrict the duration of the measurement design (Bowling, 2005). In this regard, previous research has demonstrated that a single-item self-reported measure of self-efficacy can be as effective as a multiple-item scale (Hoeppner et al., 2011; Williams & Smith, 2016). This advantage is important because a shorter survey is more likely to be answered by the participants (Nagy, 2002).

### **Goal Attainment**

Participants established one goal that was related to the coaching program's purpose and satisfied their specific needs. This variable was measured in the final session of the PPMC program to examine the coachees' performance on the selected goal. As mentioned above, the use of a single-item scale in organizational research may be useful for capturing information if there are practical constraints (e. g., respondent load, reducing survey length) (Fisher et al., 2016). Based on this approach, goal attainment was assessed by asking the participants to rate their degree of success in attaining the goal through a percentage scale (example item: "What percentage of your goal have you achieved at this moment?") from 0% (no attainment) to 100% (total attainment). Goal attainment scores were calculated by transforming percentages to scales from 1 to 10. This variable was measured in the 60-minute final follow-up session.

### **Data Analyses**

Descriptive data analysis was used to test the relationships between the study variables using the SPSS 25.0 statistical program. In order to examine the effects of the intervention program, analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a 2x2 repeated measures design was conducted to analyse differences between-subjects factor (group: EX and WL) and within-subjects factor (time: T1; T2). While T1 refers to the first pre-intervention test for both EX and WL, T2 refers to the post-intervention test for EX and to the second pre-intervention test for WL, just before this second group started the intervention.

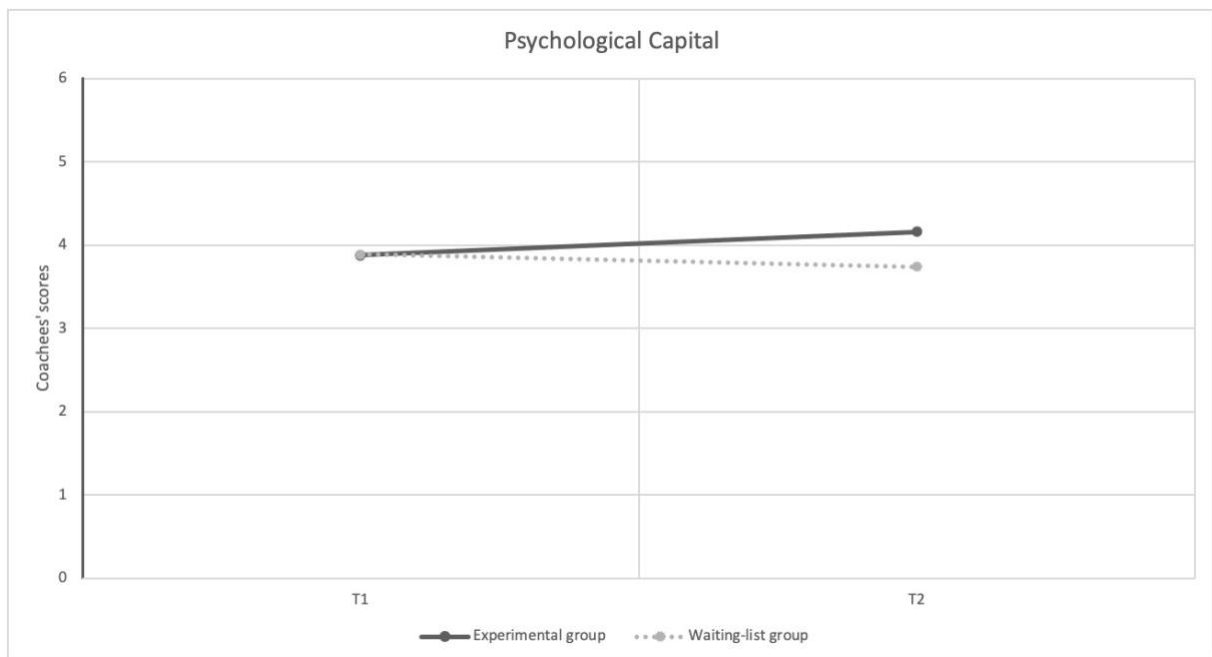
In addition, *t*-tests for related samples were performed to test for differences between Pre and Post times and Pre and FUP times considering the whole intervention group (EX and WL group), once the WL group had finished the intervention.

Moreover, following Cohen (1988), eta squared in the repeated-measures ANOVA and Cohen's *d* as a measure of the effect size on *t*-tests for related samples were estimated (small effect = .01–.03; moderate or intermediate effect = .03–.05; large effect = > .05). A significance level of 0.05 was established for all tests.

Finally, simple linear regression analyses were used to evaluate the specific link between the research variables (goal-related self-efficacy) at Pre time and the outcome variables (goal attainment) at Post time.

## Results

First, 2x2 repeated measures (ANOVA) analysis was carried out, and results showed a statistically significant difference between the EX and WL groups on the dependent variable PsyCap [ $F(1.55) = 9.65, p < 0.05, \eta_p^2 = 0.152$ ], demonstrating a large effect size. This result indicates that participants in the EX group had statistically higher levels of PsyCap at T2 (immediately after the intervention for EX, and before the intervention for WL) compared to T1 (Pre intervention time for both groups) and to WL. Figure 3 shows the interaction plots of the effects of the intervention program on PsyCap.



**Figure 3**

*Dependent variable for each time factor (T1, T2) across groups*

Next, paired-sample *t*-tests for the whole intervention group were performed to compare Pre and Post and Pre and FUP times (see Table 2). Results showed significantly higher levels of PsyCap at Post [ $t(53) = -5.22, p < 0.001, d = 1.42$ ], and FUP [ $t(46) = -5.65, p$

<0.001,  $d = 1.66$ ] compared to Pre time, revealing large effect sizes. These findings suggest that the intervention had a positive impact on the development of the participants' PsyCap, and that these effects remained high across time.

**Table 2**

*Means and t-test on PsyCap for the whole group*

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> value
Pair 1	Pre	3.82	0.437	-5,22	53	0.000
	Post	4.12				
Pair 2	Pre	3.82	0.44	-5.65	46	0.000
	FUP	4.19				

*Note:* Pair 1 = difference between Pre and Post time points for PsyCap. Pair 2 = difference between Pre and FUP time points for PsyCap. *M* = mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation. *df* = degrees of freedom. *p* = significance level. Pre = pre-intervention time; Post = post-intervention time; FUP = follow-up time.

Finally, in order to examine the relationship between goal-related self-efficacy and goal attainment, different analyses were performed. The average value of goal-related self-efficacy was 8.4 ( $SD = 1.3$ ) with a minimum score reported of 5 and a maximum of 10 suggesting that the participants perceived medium-high levels of self-efficacy at the beginning of the process. For goal attainment the mean was 7.5 ( $SD = 4.9$ ), the minimum 3 and the maximum 10 indicating that on average participants have reached 75% level of the established goal. Second, regression analyses were conducted to determine to what degree the independent variable (goal-related self-efficacy) contributes to the dependent variable (goal attainment). Results revealed that goal-related self-efficacy ( $R^2 = 0.084$ ,  $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was a significant predictor of goal attainment in the short-term PPMC program; see Table 3.

**Table 3***Regression analyses results for work-related self-efficacy as predictor of goal attainment*

Predictor	Adjusted $R^2$	$B$	$SD$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Work-related self-efficacy	0.084	0.53	0.25	0.29	2.15	0.037

Note: Dependent variable: goal attainment.

## Discussion

The main aim of this study was to investigate the impact of a PPMC program on non-executive workers' PsyCap and the connection between goal-related self-efficacy and goal attainment in the PPMC. Overall, the results agreed with this main objective of the study and confirmed the proposed hypotheses. Participants demonstrated significant increases in PsyCap after finishing the PPMC intervention and over time. Moreover, the results highlight the predictive role of goal-related self-efficacy in goal attainment in the coaching process. Therefore, results are consistent with previous research indicating that Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching (short-term and strengths-based) can be an effective and valuable intervention to enhance work-related outcomes and wellbeing, even when the number of coaching sessions is small (Theeboom et al., 2014). Finally, this study addresses a gap in the literature related to the few empirical control trial studies with a longitudinal design (Grant & O'Connor, 2018), in addition to investigating the relationship between goal-related self-efficacy and coaching outcomes (i.e., goal attainment) (Bozer & Jones, 2018).

The first hypothesis was supported in the current study. The results suggest that the intervention significantly increases PsyCap levels immediately after the intervention for the EX group when compared with the WL group. Findings also indicate a significantly increase in PsyCap after the intervention and four months after finishing it, compared to the baseline levels, considering the whole intervention group (once WL has finished the intervention). The state-like nature of PsyCap (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015) makes it suitable for interventions focused on personal growth (i.e., PPMC), and its working mechanisms (i.e., positive evaluation of the scenarios and opportunities to success based on effort and



persistence; Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013) confirm the positive and direct effect of PPMC. Based on the assumption that the coaching process pursues the capacity for growth of personal resources, these results are congruent with previous studies confirming that coaching provides the perfect environment for the development of PsyCap (Petersen, 2015). The effect of the non-executive PPMC program on PsyCap has not been previously investigated, and so these findings provide new scientific evidence in this regard.

The second hypothesis was also confirmed. The results revealed that goal-related self-efficacy is a significant predictor of goal attainment in the PPMC program; that is, participants' goal-related self-efficacy enhanced positive outcomes (i.e., goal attainment) at the end of the intervention. Despite not having a baseline measurement for goal attainment (participants were asked only in the last coaching session about the level of achievement of the goal they established in the first session), an improvement in goal attainment was reported as stated by the participants during the last coaching session, and considering the high level of percentage achieved. Based on the RE-GROW model, interventions focused on achieving a specific goal and self-efficacy were shown to be a crucial precedent for coaching performance (de Haan et al., 2013). Because the coaching process aimed to help the coachee to set his/her own personal goals, it may have contributed to greater commitment to the goal and increased motivation to achieve it, followed by positive outcomes that are likely to strengthen feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). As expected in this study, and in line with previous research (Evers et al., 2006), considering the essence of specific self-efficacy for achieving goals, the effect on goal attainment was positive and high. This finding addresses the gap in the literature and the request to relate goal-related self-efficacy to coaching outcomes (Bozer & Jones, 2018) and reinforce the importance of enhancing personal resources (i.e., self-efficacy) (Demerouti, et al., 2011).

Moreover, results from this research contribute to the literature on coaching psychology by demonstrating that micro-coaching can be a useful positive intervention to improve optimal organizational functioning. Therefore, the study results are consistent with previous research showing that even if the number of coaching sessions is small, coaching

can be successful (Peláez et al., 2020; Theboom et al., 2014). The reason short-term coaching led to successful outcomes could be that the intervention focuses on developing specific skills and goals in a relatively brief period of time. Additionally, the findings strengthen the literature on empirical control trial studies with a longitudinal design, considering the effect of PPMC on work-related outcomes (i.e., PsyCap), long-term effects of coaching, and the role of self-efficacy in goal attainment.

### **Implications for Practice**

Some practical implications emerge from the study results. First, this study provides further evidence of the positive impact that PPMC has on employees' personal resources and work outcomes, and it may contribute to the competitive advantage of an organization. In other words, investing in and developing employees' personal resources is usually promoted in healthy organizations, understood as those that care about the psychosocial health of their workers (Salanova et al., 2012; 2019b). This study has shown that relatively few coaching sessions can be effective, which could be an important element to consider given the challenges faced by organizations in turbulent and changing environments. People are working under time pressure and have to use their time effectively; under the paradigm of urgent vs important, coaching may not be a priority task. In this regard, short coaching sessions are beneficial in terms of motivation, flexibility, costs, and parsimony, due to their focus on specific goals. In PPMC, not only positive resources are developed and reinforced, but also the coachee receive support in the development and use of techniques to handle challenging circumstances and cope with difficulties (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). The complicated interactions between positive aspects of human functioning and negative experiences alter the way people think, feel and behave (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016), and therefore should be taken into account in the coaching process.

Therefore, coaching provides opportunities not only to develop abilities and internalize them in everyday life (Evers, 2006), but also to increase the effectiveness of coachees' functioning and work performance even when the environment is challenging.

Workplace coaching needs to be agile, flexible, and easily integrated into the organization (Grant, 2016). Thus, workplace coaching, specifically PPMC, can serve as an important tool that can facilitate significant positive organizational change to address the problems that contemporary companies are experiencing. It is a short-term interaction designed to obtain long-term benefits.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Finally, some limitations of this study must be recognized. First, participants were not assigned randomly to either the EX or the WL group because the allocation depended on the participants' availability and the organization's priorities. Nevertheless, the findings of the *t*-test analysis between the groups did not show any significant difference in the outcome variable (PsyCap) at T1 (before the intervention).

Second, the sample was small and very specific; therefore, the result cannot be generalized. Therefore, future investigations should examine the effect of this intervention in other sectors or companies and extend the sample in order to contrast the results. Thus, replications are welcome in order to discover the benefits of the intervention based on its positive effects in other sectors, companies, or countries, and give greater validity to our findings.

Third, due to the organizational context, the comparison of the EX and WL groups at FUP was not possible because the WL group started the intervention shortly after the EX group finished it. Nonetheless, we found valuable results by comparing the whole intervention group across time (before, after, and FUP), calculating paired-sample *t* tests. Future studies should consider adjusting the research design in order to compare the two conditions at this evaluation time. Additionally, we highlight the importance of a FUP evaluation to ensure the maintenance of the results over time and the use of objective or multisource ratings of outcome variables and the results.

Fourth, the self-efficacy and goal attainment measurements based on single-item scales are sensitive to bias and error. Additionally, the changes of self-efficacy and goal

attainment were not possible to analyse since they were measured only once. Even so, our results were positive and congruent with previous research. However, the use of the Goal Attainment Scaling and the Self-efficacy Scale (Chen et al., 2001) should be considered in future studies for more accuracy, as well as evaluating the variables in different times in order to examine changes.

Fifth, our study is also limited by the use of self-reported data and thus it was not possible for the investigators to objectively determine the veracity of such data. Self-reported performance might boost social desirability (Caputo, 2017). Furthermore, as participation was voluntary, the competence and motivation of participants could have influenced our results. However, findings are consistent with the theory, and we attempted to minimize the impact of these biases in our study by collecting data over time (i.e., before, after and follow-up times). It could be valuable to include a wider range of objective measurements to examine the impact of this intervention. Also, it would be valuable to consider, not only the positive aspects of well-being, but also the evaluation of negative experiences and emotional states to gain a complete and realistic picture of wellbeing (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016; Wong, 2011). Additionally, it could be interesting to assess in future studies the benefit and impact of PPMC on performance variables such as behavioral persistence and performance flexibility (Theeboom et al., 2016; Wong, 2006).

Finally, even though positive and significant effects of PPMC were found on PsyCap and in the connection between goal-related self-efficacy and goal attainment, future research should consider focusing on specific factors in the effectiveness of coaching (e.g., performance, SMART goals, working alliance, commitment to the process) and on the analysis of the links between self-efficacy, goal attainment and changes on the outcome variable (PsyCap). Our study has shown that short-term coaching can be successful. However, a comparison of short-term and long-term interventions in future research would be very useful.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this study provides relevant information for both researchers and professionals. From a theoretical perspective, the results offer evidence about the effects of a Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching intervention on psychological capital and the predictability of goal-related self-efficacy on goal attainment during the coaching process. The present study presents original data indicating that short-term sessions are indeed effective in enhancing personal resources (i.e., PsyCap) and that on average participants reported medium-high percentage of attainment of their established goals. It also demonstrates that workplace coaching can increase PsyCap in non-executive workers, using a longitudinal controlled design. Although the effects of the intervention cannot be generalized, and comparisons of EX-WL at FUP were not possible, the encouraging results suggest that future studies should include stronger designs (i.e., multiple measurement points, and randomization). From an applied perspective, this research represents a significant development from an operational point of view because it provides professionals with an innovative and replicable intervention that can be adapted and implemented across a wide range of organizations. The findings highlight the strategic value of providing personal growth opportunities that can help employees to develop their skills to handle challenging circumstances and cope with difficulties, and therefore, contribute to successful organizational outcomes.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Strengths-based Leadership Coaching to enhance Positive Leadership, and its impact on Well-being and Performance: A controlled study**

#### Abstract

Positive Psychology Coaching is a holistic and client-centered approach that draws on positive psychology techniques to guide individuals in flourishing and nurturing positive leadership practices. Increasing the leader's hope and psychological flexibility (i.e., emotional and cognitive agility) is critical, and especially in turbulent settings and crises (Smith et al., 2021). The current study provides empirical evidence that, as an approach, strengths-based leadership coaching may be a valuable methodology to enhance managers' positive leadership skills and performance, as well as teams' well-being and job performance. During a period of four months, a group of 60 executive workers (12 in the experimental group and 9 in the waiting-list control group) from an automotive industry company engaged in a Strengths-Based Leadership Coaching program with a controlled trial design. The intervention program followed a strengths-based approach and the RE-GROW model (Grant, 2003, 2011a), and consisted of a two-hour interactive group session followed by three individual micro-coaching sessions lasting 90 minutes each. Participants (N = 21 leaders) and their employees (N = 121) took part in a pre-post evaluation during the study period. Our findings revealed that the intervention was successful in increasing the participants' positive leadership skills and in- and extra- role performance, as well as the well-being and job performance (in- and extra-role) of their teams at both individual and team levels. In terms of practical implications, the results suggest that leadership training interventions aimed at developing leadership skills may be beneficial for leaders' growth and team members' individual and group-level outcomes.

*Keywords:* strengths-based coaching, short-term coaching, positive leadership style, well-being, in- and extra-role job performance, control trial.

Organizational turbulence and an ambiguous market environment have become increasingly widespread in organizations (Bodlaj & Čater, 2019; Millar et al., 2018). Leaders have been dealing with complexity and uncertainty for decades, and now technological advancement, competitiveness, globalization, and a significant increase in customer expectations require nurturing leaders' skills to address these challenges and anticipate change, be agile enough to deal with it, and become adaptable (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). These challenges have altered the automotive market as well, and more efficiency and resilience are required (Ivanov et al., 2018). Leaders are starting to observe a decline in employee positivity (Malinga et al., 2019), and so they are seeking new strategies to motivate their employees, boost productivity, and foster a healthy work environment, in order to create a safer work environment and improve employees' dedication (Cameron, 2012; Malinga et al., 2019). Executive coaching is particularly well positioned to respond to this demand because it can be tailored to the objectives and demands of the leader through one-to-one conversations (Page & de Haan, 2014).

Given that Positive Psychology emphasizes strengths rather than weaknesses, cultivating positive characteristics and maximizing the potential for subjective well-being, this field of study can be positioned as strengths-based psychology, and it is highly applied in an executive coaching context (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007). According to van Zyl et al. (2020), Positive Psychological Coaching (also known as Strengths-Based Coaching or Positive Coaching) can be defined as:

A short- to medium-term professional, collaborative relationship between a client and a coach, aimed at the identification, utilization, optimization and development of personal/psychological strengths and resources in order to enhance positive states, traits and behaviours. Utilizing Socratic goal setting and positive psychological evidence-based approaches facilitate personal/professional growth, optimal functioning, enhanced wellbeing, the actualization of people's potential and aid in coping with work-demands. (p. 11)

The growth of positive psychology coaching (Burke & Passmore, 2019; Freire, 2013; van Zyl et al., 2020) has given coaches the opportunity to employ both strengths-focused

and positivity-oriented concepts in their practice (Passmore & Oades, 2014). Some authors suggest that following a strengths-based approach is a key component of coaching interventions (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007; Burke & Pasmore, 2019). Moreover, short-term coaching may be a beneficial intervention for organizations that want to optimize costs and time, given that society changes constantly and unpredictably. Micro-coaching, in contrast to traditional coaching, focuses on specific and short-term goals that can be accomplished in a smaller number of sessions (Corbu et al., 2021; Peláez et al., 2020; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020; Theeboom et al., 2014).

Leadership interventions are designed to help executives master new skills and behaviours that improve their performance and, as a result, the organizations' overall effectiveness and performance (Anthony, 2017; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Gray, 2006). Executive coaching is increasingly becoming one of the dominant methods for building great leaders (Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2020). Strengths-based leadership coaching aligns personal strengths with leadership skills and organizational goals (MacKie, 2014). Previous research has shown that leadership skills and performance increase after strengths-based coaching interventions (MacKie, 2014; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020; Theeboom et al., 2014), indicating that executive coaching can be a beneficial tool for leaders and organizations.

Positive leaders focus on strategies that provide strengths-based development and positive energy to employees and organizations. Specifically, positive leadership (PL) fosters excellent performance by nurturing a positive work environment, positive relationships among employees, and positive communication, due to the fact that it is results driven and connects the tasks completed to positive meaning (Cameron, 2012). These behaviours are linked to positive outcomes such as greater overall performance and productivity, well-being, and organizational citizenship behaviour (Malinga et al., 2019). A growing body of research has analysed the link between positive leadership practices and employees' well-being and, consequently, positive outcomes (Kelloway et al., 2013; Shinbrot, 2019:). Previous studies have found that PL is positively related to performance (Cameron & Plews, 2012; Ramdas &



Patrick, 2019), engagement, optimism and productivity (Arakawa & Greenberg, 2007), and positive mental health, well-being, and work performance (Davenport et al., 2016).

Although there has been an increase in the number of studies on the impact of executive coaching on leadership styles (Ballesteros-Sánchez et al., 2019; MacKie, 2014), well-being, and performance, there continues to be a call for more research on the impact of positive psychological coaching, and particularly strengths-based coaching, on a positive leadership style and its consequences for well-being and performance in leaders and their teams. Moreover, there is a lack of research on the design of coaching interventions, and we attempt to address this gap in this study.

### **Strengths-based Coaching and Positive Leadership**

Leadership is widely recognized as playing a significant role in improving organizational health and well-being (Peiró & Rodríguez, 2008; Rosenbach et al., 2018; Salanova et al., 2019a). Within the field of Positive Organizational Psychology (POP), defined as the scientific study of an individual's or organization's optimal functioning (Salanova, Llorens, & Martínez, 2016), different positive leadership styles have been developed, including transformational, authentic, positive (Blanch et al., 2016), and coach (Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Cox et al., 2010; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020). The different types of leadership included in this field have a strong affinity and common elements. Their theoretical overlap is linked to the way leaders stimulate and try to maintain levels of optimal performance in their followers by promoting virtuous and eudaimonic behaviours (Cameron & Plews, 2012). Although there is strong evidence supporting the role of some of these models, such as authentic and transformational leadership styles, in enhancing work-related outcomes, research on the development and impact of the positive leadership (PL) style created by Kim Cameron (2013) is in its infancy. The essence of PL's meaning within the desired organizational context has not been sufficiently captured (Pietiläinen & Salmi, 2017). Arguments in favour of the PL concept have vigorously supported various strategies that

support affirmative preconceptions, behaviours, and actions (Cameron et al., 2017; Kelloway et al., 2013).

Positive leadership refers to leaders who implement positive practices to help organizations and individuals reach their full potential, thrive at work, feel more energized, and become more effective (Cameron, 2013; Cameron et al., 2017). Positive leaders are those whose behaviour demonstrates a tendency toward the positive (Ramdas & Patrick, 2019; Wooten & Cameron, 2010;). This kind of leadership has three characteristics (Cameron, 2012): (1) It facilitates excellent performance; (2) It is based on a positive deviant results approach by focusing on people's strengths and capabilities; and (3) It creates positive workplace energy by fostering virtuousness. Kim Cameron's positive leadership framework consists of the following dimensions: (1) Positive climate "refers to the condition in which positive emotions predominate over negative emotions in a workplace" (Cameron, 2008, p. 17); (2) Positive relationships "refer to relationships that are a source of richness, vitality, and learning" (Cameron, 2008, p. 35); (3) Positive communication "takes place in organizations when the language of affirmation and support replaces negative, critical language" (Cameron, 2008, p. 51); (4) Creating positive meaning consists of making people feel that they are pursuing a significant purpose on the job (Cameron, 2008, p. 67); and (5) Positive strategies are used to standardize and implement the four positive dimensions based on specific planned interactions between the leader and his/her followers (Cameron, 2008, pp. 81–82).

Leadership coaching provides the core transformation criteria to address the challenge of achieving effective executive coaching outcomes, with a specific mission to positively increase knowledge and strengthen successful leadership actions (Elliott, 2011). Coaching interventions need to be tailored to the managerial context to ensure a positive developmental climate (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). Coaching training programs should give participants the opportunity to apply the skills learned daily (Grossman & Salas, 2011).

Some authors (Rekalde et al., 2015) suggest that coaching is a useful tool to contribute to and assist in developing strategies that enhance managers' personal and

professional growth by providing them with continuous knowledge construction in one or more of their visible behaviours. Specific and grounded in positive psychology, strengths-based leadership coaching has been shown to be an effective way to support the development of leadership skills in organizations. This approach follows a structure based on the identification, development, and use of signature strengths, aligning them with leadership skills and personal or organizational goals (MacKie, 2014). The participation of leaders in executive coaching is also a powerful strategy that directly affects not only their own levels of well-being (Gabriel et al., 2014; Jarosz, 2021), but also their employees' well-being, behaviour, and performance.

In addition, various leadership styles, including transformational leadership (Liu et al., 2010; Nielsen et al., 2008), authentic leadership (Rahimnia & Sharifirad, 2015), appreciative leadership (Stocker et al., 2014), and positive leadership (Kelloway et al., 2013), have been found to have significant correlations with employee well-being. Nevertheless, research on PL and its impact on well-being and performance is still scarce (Gladis, 2013; Zbierowski, 2016), and few studies have examined the effectiveness of positive psychology coaching programs in providing training in leadership skills. In this study, we seek to address this gap by testing the effectiveness of the Strengths-based Coaching intervention, which was specifically designed for the development of PL skills in work settings.

**Hypothesis 1:** Participants in the Strengths-based Leadership Coaching intervention will show a significant increase in their Positive Leadership levels in T2 (after the intervention) in the Experimental (EX) group, compared to T1 (before the intervention) and compared to a Waiting List-control (WL) group.

### **Strengths-based Coaching and Well-being**

Mental health is more than the absence of illness. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2004). Research

has shown that individuals with higher levels of well-being achieve positive outcomes such as higher productivity, increased life satisfaction, prosocial conduct, and positive relationships (Diener, 2012; Huppert & So, 2013; Warr & Nielsen, 2018). Well-being is a multidimensional construct that encompasses how well people are functioning and includes different aspects of life such as purpose in life and interpersonal and personal growth (Marsh et al., 2020; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Most authors differentiate between two types of well-being: hedonia and eudaimonia. Whereas hedonic well-being emphasizes life satisfaction and positive emotional components (Diener et al., 2018), eudaimonic well-being is more than immediate pleasure and happiness. It emphasizes optimal psychological functioning, which depends on self-fulfilment and includes notions such as personal growth, a sense of meaning, and autonomy (Ryff, 2018). According to “The Functioning Well-Being Approach” (Straume & Vitters, 2012), hedonia and eudaimonia are two different elements of a fulfilling life. On the one hand, hedonic states are more related to low-complexity scenarios than to complex goal pursuit activities. The eudaimonic component, on the other hand, ignites and maintains goal pursuit processes driven by motivational states of learning, at least when some effort is required (Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2018). This distinction can be described in terms of the mental mode required to accomplish challenging tasks (eudaimonia) or situations where achieving goals brings a sense of happiness and fulfilment (hedonia). This perspective fits the goal-oriented approach of the Strengths-based Coaching process. Although these two perspectives are highly correlated and both are important for understanding employees’ workplace well-being, this study adopts a more holistic perspective because it follows a “non-clinical” approach, as in eudaimonic or psychological well-being.

Moreover, the “Happy and Productive Worker” Theory (HPWT) suggests that if the employees’ needs are satisfied (i.e., happy employees), they will achieve greater performance than unhappy employees (Wright & Cropanzano, 2007). Improving and sustaining well-being at work has become one of the key issues in organizations, especially in the current era of the Covid-19 pandemic, where social and work environments are

changing rapidly and uncertainty is an important life stressor affecting workers' physical and mental health (Webster et al., 2020). In times of crisis and turbulence, psychological well-being is necessary for employee retention and job satisfaction (Vermaak et al., 2017). Moreover, psychological well-being also results in other positive outcomes such as performance (Peiró et al., 2021; Wright & Huang, 2012). Recently, Jarosz (2021) conducted a study examining the impact of coaching in workplaces on improving well-being and performance during challenging times. The results showed that individuals who received a "Well-Being and Performance Coaching Program" over a period of five weeks experienced higher levels of well-being and performance.

Positive psychological wellbeing has been shown to improve human functioning and experience (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2020; Fledderus et al., 2010). According to past research, certain psychological interventions, such as coaching or positive psychological interventions, can raise psychological well-being levels (Castiello D'Antonio, 2018; Fava et al., 2005; Weiss et al., 2016). However, to date, few attempts have been made to implement positive psychological coaching interventions and explore their impact on well-being related variables using controlled trial designs. One example is the study by Peláez et al., (2020), whose results demonstrated the positive impact of a strengths-based micro-coaching program on employees' work engagement. A replication of that intervention program was tested in another study (Corbu et al., 2021), and the results confirmed its effects on developing employees' positive psychological capital, namely self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope. Positive psychological coaching has also been implemented and tested with leaders, for instance, to train and develop leadership skills (i.e., coaching skills). Moreover, a recent study demonstrated the positive effects of this intervention on participants' work engagement and psychological capital (Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020).

Although there has been an increase in the number of studies on this topic, there continues to be a need for more empirical studies on the design and evaluation of executive coaching interventions based on the alignment between signature strengths and positive

leadership skills and their impact on employees' well-being. Therefore, in the current study, we attempt to address this gap.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Employees' levels of eudaimonic well-being will significantly increase in the EX-group after completing the intervention and compared to the WL-group.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Employees' levels of hedonic well-being will not significantly increase in the EX-group after completing the intervention and compared to the WL-group.

### **Strengths-based Coaching and Job Performance**

Job performance can be understood as "a function of a person's behaviour and the extent to which that behaviour helps an organization to reach its goals" (Ford et al., 2011). Usually, two types of performance measures have been considered, i.e., in-role and extra-role performance. Goodman and Svyantek (1999) described in-role performance as the employee's direct duties. Extra-role performance, on the other hand, refers to actions that benefit the organization and exceed the requirements of the position. Extra-role behaviours are those that boost the flow of information, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and encourage a sense of teamwork.

With regard to job performance, it is interesting to note that most of the past research on HPWT has focused on the individual level. However, the changing nature of work and organizations has increased the importance of teams and work units. Team performance can be related to the work content, as in the case of task performance, context-specific performance, and creativity (Peiró et al., 2019). It can also refer to outcomes, such as goal achievement, or processes, such as members' daily work activities, and it can be evaluated by team members themselves (self-rated performance) or their managers. Team members commonly estimate each other's effectiveness based on their own perceptions (i.e., self-rated team performance). However, very little is known about the impact of a positive leadership style, trained through Strengths-based Leadership Coaching, on employees' group performance.

Furthermore, past studies have associated the use of strengths with improved work performance. Overall, people who have opportunities to use their skills at work are more likely to perform well, not only by completing tasks, but also by adapting to change and acting more proactively in their work environments (Dubreuil et al., 2014; see reviews by Ghielen et al., 2018; Miglianico et al., 2020, for more). Thus, the use of strengths is connected to both in-role and extra-role performance.

Previous research has shown a connection between coaching and job performance. Workplace coaching is a relatively direct technique used to identify goals and establish action plans in order to optimize employee performance (Grant, 2013a; Theeboom et al., 2014). Coaching can help employees achieve higher levels of performance by guiding them in establishing specific goals, increasing their motivation, and engaging in self-awareness and potential growth (Grant, 2011a, 2013a). Using models such as Review-Evaluate-Goal-Reality-Options-Will (RE-GROW; see Grant, 2003, 2011a) encourages coaches to own their goal setting and behaviour change. To change behaviour and, hence, improve performance, coaching generates a self-regulation cycle. Even though coaching has been broadly implemented in the workplace for several decades, relatively little research has been conducted on its influence and effectiveness (Green & Spence, 2014). Moreover, according to several studies, higher levels of performance can be achieved by improving individuals' well-being (Krekel et al., 2019; Sonnentag, 2015; Wright et al., 2007;), satisfaction with the job (Ajayi & Abimbola, 2013; Fogaça & Junior, 2016; Yanchovska, 2021), and positive affect (Hosie et al., 2012; Rothbard & Wilk, 2012).

Despite the rising popularity and benefits of strengths-based leadership coaching in organizations, little is known about its impact on employees' in- and extra-role performance (Dubreuil et al., 2014; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020). This is unexpected because the strengths-based approach seeks to promote optimal functioning (Linley et al., 2010), and particularly Strengths-based Leadership Coaching has been shown to be effective in increasing job performance (Peláez et al., 2020). Although the findings are interesting, research is still needed to explore the impact of the Strengths-based Leadership Coaching

intervention on individual and group performance. To address this gap, we propose the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3a:** Leaders' levels of individual in- and extra-role performance will increase in the EX-group after participating in the intervention (from T1 to T2) and compared to the WL-group.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Employees' levels of individual in- and extra-role performance will increase in the EX-group after completing the intervention (from T1 to T2) and compared to the WL-group.

**Hypothesis 3c:** Employees' levels of group in- and extra-role performance will increase in the EX-group after completing the intervention (from T1 to T2) and compared to the WL-group.

## Method

### Sample and Procedure

The investigation was carried out in a multinational automotive industry company situated in Spain. Twenty-four senior and middle managers (participants) were invited to participate in the micro-coaching intervention through the Human Resources internal platform. Finally, a total of 21 participants (87.5%) were involved in the program: 12 participants in the experimental group (EX) and 9 in the waiting-list-control group (WL) as untreated comparisons in the study. Senior and middle managers were mixed in the two groups. In terms of participants' demographics, 81% were male, and the mean age was 47 years ( $SD = 6.4$ ). Furthermore, 100% of participants had a permanent employment contract, and the average length of time working in the company was 19.38 years ( $SD = 5.9$ ). Due to unforeseen work-related and personal events, three managers from the WL-group did not complete the intervention program. Therefore, a total of 18 (75%) participants completed the program and responded to a post-intervention questionnaire. Participants' employees ( $N = 121$ ) were also asked to participate in the data collection at different times, even though they were not invited to participate in the intervention program. Employees' mean age was 44

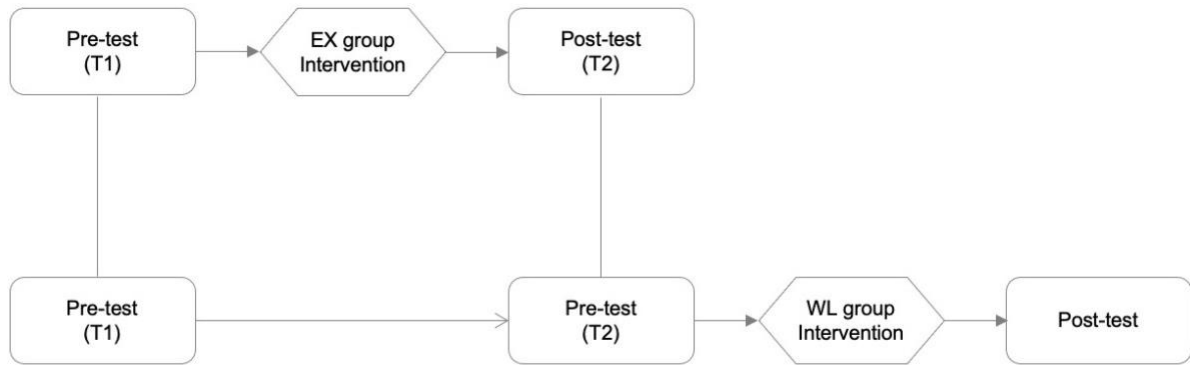


years ( $SD = 6.9$ ), 76.9% were male, 93.4% had a permanent employment contract, and the average tenure in the company was 15.45 years ( $SD = 7.4$ ).

Participation was entirely voluntary, and confidentiality of their answers was guaranteed according to the European data regulation standards. No additional financial incentives were given to participants for their contribution. All subjects signed an online informed consent for their personal data to be used for scientific research purposes. The research adhered to ethical standards approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University.

Prior to the actual start of the program, the researchers contacted the HR department to organize an initial meeting to analyse the feasibility of carrying out a positive psychological intervention in the organization. Next, a meeting was held with the head of the HR department to define the action plan and discuss the awareness and information campaign in order to ensure participants' cooperation.

Participants ( $N = 21$ ) and their employees ( $N = 121$ ) were asked to respond to an online research questionnaire evaluating all the study variables at different times (Time 1: PRE-assessment; participants:  $N = 21$ ; employees:  $N = 93$ , and Time 2: POST-assessment, immediately after finishing the intervention; participants:  $N = 16$ ; employees:  $N = 28$ ). The PRE-assessment process was designed to establish a base level and raise participants' awareness of their current abilities in order to further develop them in the micro-coaching sessions. Participants and employees received an individual email with a direct link to the online questionnaire at all the evaluation times. Participants in the EX-group started the two-hour group session, followed by three individual micro-coaching sessions. Figure 1 describes the research design of the study.



**Figure 1**

*Research design of the study. EX: experimental group; WL: waiting list-control group; Pre-test: PRE-assessment; Post-test: POST-assessment; T1: time 1; T2: time 2.*

The participants' positive leadership skills were both self-reported and assessed by their employees. Furthermore, only the employees evaluated their own eudaimonic well-being. In addition, both participants and employees rated their own levels of in- and extra-role performance, whereas only employees rated group in- and extra-role performance.

The study characteristics, the assessment process, the aim of the intervention, and the confidentiality of the answers were communicated to employees during the early stages of the project. Randomization of the groups (EX and WL) was not possible because the assignment depended on the organization's preferences, the participants' availability, and the coaches' schedules.

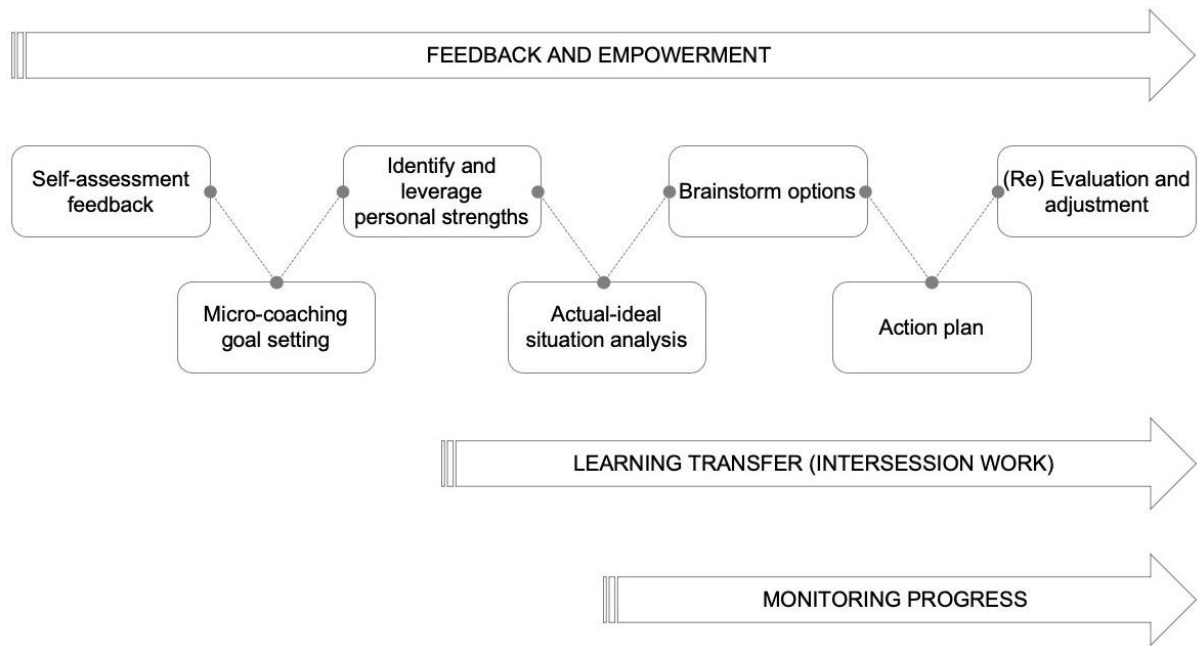
### **Program Description**

The participants took part in a leadership development intervention titled "Strengths-based Leadership Coaching", which involved a positive psychological micro-coaching intervention designed specifically for the enhancement and development of leadership skills in employees with executive responsibilities. The aims of the program were: (1) to deliver feedback on the self-assessment questionnaire results evaluated at PRE-intervention (positive leadership, eudaimonic well-being, individual and group in- and extra-role

performance); (2) to help participants enhance and optimize their positive leadership skills (i.e., develop leadership and management capability and personal improvement) and performance; and (3) to increase employees' well-being and performance.

Previous research showed that this particular positive psychological micro-coaching intervention has positive effects and is a valuable approach for improving work engagement and job performance (see for review: Peláez et al., 2020), as well as psychological capital and goal-related self-efficacy (see for review: Corbu et al., 2021). In order to increase its effectiveness, the present study adapted the program, focusing on the development of positive leadership skills.

Positive psychology builds on a significant amount of empirical research, and so a coaching model based on positive psychology principles can help individuals to reach goals through a more structured and consistent approach. The framework used in the coaching sessions of this study followed a strengths-based approach (Corbu et al., 2021; Linley et al., 2010; Peláez et al., 2020) and the RE-GROW model (Grant, 2003; Grant, 2011a). The intervention focused on the following phases: (1) self-assessment feedback; (2) goal setting related to positive leadership skills; (3) personal strengths identification, development, and use; (4) visualization of current and ideal situations; (5) brainstorming or identifying different options to achieve the goal; (6) developing the action plan; (7) and (re) evaluating and adjusting the action plan. The steps followed in the program also focused on the generic cycle of self-regulation (see Grant for review, 2003). Each coaching session began by monitoring the progress made in the intersession work (i.e., learning transfer to the workplace) since the previous session through self-reflection and by modifying actions to further improve performance and achieve goals (see Figure 2), thus facilitating flexibility and adaptation to the work circumstances.



**Figure 2**

*Micro-coaching intervention program model*

The intervention program lasted four months, and it was delivered in a two-hour group workshop session, followed by three bi-weekly 90-min individual coaching sessions. The coaching sessions were conducted by four professional psychologists who were external to the organization and had specific coaching and positive psychology proficiency. Moreover, they attended two group supervision sessions with qualified professionals in this field (once at the beginning of the process and another in the middle). In order to secure accurate and comparable data on the core issues of the coaching process, all four coaches had to follow a guide (i.e., protocol). In addition, the key points of the sessions, which were based on the protocol, had to be registered by each coach. This method ensured that the observations were made following the same procedure.

The Strengths-based Leadership Coaching intervention program began with a group session focused on providing participants with academic input related to Positive Organizational Psychology (Salanova et al., 2016) and Positive Leadership style, in order to ensure that leaders would be able to focus on strategies that empower individuals and the

organization as a whole through strengths-based development and positive energy (Cameron, 2012). Next, the results of the individual report from the PRE self-assessment were delivered and discussed. The group session incorporated group interactions, and based on the outcomes, each participant formulated a specific development goal related to the enhancement of their positive leadership abilities (i.e., positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, positive meaning, positive strategies). In addition, they received a booklet that included a work guide, information, and instructions for coaching activities and reading material.

The following two 90-min individual coaching sessions focused on their progress in achieving their goals, identifying strengths and overcoming obstacles. Consequently, adjustments were made to the action plan and goals, based on the evaluation of the progress made between coaching sessions. The sessions had the following format: the (re) definition of the goal and the measurement indicators to reinforce the achievement of the result; the analysis of the gap between the current and ideal scenarios, identification of personal strengths required to achieve the goal, followed by a discussion of participants' skills, growth areas, and external opportunities. Next, an action plan was established. Participants focused on implementing the action plan. The facilitators accompanied the participants in monitoring and adjusting the goal or actions in order to achieve better results in each session. To ensure knowledge transfer back to the daily routine, the "*Best Possible Self*" technique, developed by Laura King (2001), was used, along with a visualization exercise considering their own personal strengths. Participants were encouraged to imagine themselves in the greatest possible future situation considering three main aspects (personal, professional, and social areas). This activity was found to be effective in enhancing personal and psychological well-being in Peters et al. (2010). In this intervention, this method was tailored to the participants' individual micro-coaching process and their unique strengths used in the intervention program, motivating them to write down and then picture the journey to achieve the goal by using their personal skills.

Finally, a 60-minute follow-up session was held to monitor the action plan, savoring the positive effects, and goal success was measured to empower them and provide motivation for future actions and learning transfer. Furthermore, feedback on the program was provided for improvement. Table 1 outlines the intervention program.

**Table 1**

*Positive Psychological Micro-Coaching sessions outline*

<b>Session</b>	<b>Key objective</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Intersession work</b>
1	Rapport, self-assessment feedback, goal setting, and exercise book delivery.	Greeting: presentation, objectives, structure and internal rules of the intervention. Ice-breaking exercise: personal presentation using symbols. Positive Psychology Coaching and Positive Leadership theoretical inputs. Study variables results delivery. Goal setting through SMART+ technique: role-playing in pairs.	Self-discovery activity: Reflect upon the gap between actual and ideal situation and personal strengths. VIA Questionnaire.
2	GROW model.	Review and feedback session 1: potential areas uncovered. <b>REALITY</b> : identifying and leveraging personal strengths and weaknesses (symbol identification, VIA results, SOWT analysis). Actual-ideal situation analysis. <b>OPTIONS</b> : brainstorming, and analysis of advantages and disadvantages. <b>ACTION PLAN</b> : detailed description of what, why, when, how, and who questions. Monitoring progress.	"Timeline" activity: steps to follow for the action plan. Initiate the action plan: learning transfer in the workplace.
3	Follow-up the action plan, (re)evaluation and adjustment.	Review and feedback session 2. Review and adaptation of "Timeline" activity. Advances and challenges achieved at the moment and future actions. Written and visualized the "Best Possible Self" exercise. Monitoring progress.	Practice and monitoring the plan: learning transfer in the workplace.
4	Closure, review, feedback and empowerment.	Review session 3: task and activities, action plan, and doubts. Feedback on the process, and coaches' performance. Empowerment and motivation for future actions.	

## Measures

### ***Positive Leadership.***

Positive Leadership was measured using the 15-item reduced Spanish version of the Positive Leadership Assessment Scale (PLAS; Antino et al., 2014). The positive leadership scale includes five dimensions: (1) Positive climate (i.e., foster information sharing so that people become aware of colleagues' difficulties and, therefore, can express compassion); (2) Positive relationships (i.e., ensure that employees have an opportunity to provide emotional, intellectual, or physical support to others, in addition to receiving support from others); (3) Positive communication (i.e., provide opportunities for employees to receive best-self feedback and develop best-self-portraits); (4) Creating positive meaning (i.e., provide negative feedback in supportive ways — especially using descriptive rather than evaluative statements — so that the relationship is strengthened), and (5) Positive strategies (i.e., consistently and continually emphasize continuous improvement and the development of strong interpersonal relationships among your direct employees). Each of the five dimensions consisted of three items, and the response scale ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always). The PLAS was responded to by participants and employees.

### ***Eudaimonic and hedonic well-being.***

These constructs were assessed with the “Eudaimonic Well-Being” and “Hedonic Well-Being” subscales of remembered well-being from the Spanish version of the Pemberton Happiness Index – PHI (Hervás & Vázquez, 2013). The “Eudaimonic Well-Being” subscale consists of six items addressing optimal psychological functioning (i.e., My life is full of learning experiences and challenges that make me grow). Employees were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 0 (Totally disagree) to 10 (Totally agree). The “Hedonic Well-Being” subscale consists of two items addressing affective states (i.e., I enjoy a lot of little things every day). Employees were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 0 (Totally disagree) to 10 (Totally agree).

The internal consistencies of all the scales (Cronbach's alpha), based on the reliability test, showed that these measures can accurately assess the study variables. See Table 2 for participants' scores and Table 3 for employees' scores.

**Table 2**

*PRE and POST participants' scores: means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, and correlations between all the variables in the whole intervention group*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>α</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>PRE intervention scores</b>											
1. Positive leadership	4.2	0.62	0.87	1							
2. Positive climate	4.5	0.68	0.6	0.5*	1						
3. Positive relationships	4.03	0.76	0.63	0.84**	0.34	1					
4. Positive communication	4.01	0.78	0.58	0.87**	0.31	0.74**	1				
5. Creating positive meaning	4.59	0.77	0.85	0.73**	0.14	0.48*	0.55**	1			
6. Positive strategies	3.71	1	0.78	0.88**	0.27	0.67**	0.71**	0.61**	1		
7. Individual in-role performance	4.84	0.59	0.83	0.6**	0.38	0.52*	0.52*	0.54*	0.37	1	
8. Individual extra-role performance	4.79	0.73	0.81	0.67**	0.57**	0.55*	0.41	0.59**	0.48*	0.41	1
<b>POST intervention scores</b>											
1. Positive leadership	4.93	0.48	0.89	1							
2. Positive climate	5.06	0.68	0.85	0.8**	1						
3. Positive relationships	4.98	0.64	0.85	0.74**	0.7**	1					
4. Positive communication	4.98	0.48	0.68	0.94**	0.66**	0.63**	1				
5. Creating positive meaning	4.98	0.59	0.66	0.75**	0.43	0.27	0.71**	1			
6. Positive strategies	4.63	0.67	0.62	0.75**	0.32	0.29	0.77**	0.62*	1		
7. Individual in-role performance	5.34	0.46	0.93	0.81**	0.86**	0.61*	0.71**	0.61*	0.42	1	
8. Individual extra-role performance	5.48	0.54	0.98	0.73**	0.66**	0.31	0.64**	0.7**	0.57*	0.75**	1

*Correlations; \*\*p < 0.001; \*p < 0.05.*



**Table 3**

*PRE and POST employees' scores: means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, and correlations between all the variables in the whole intervention group*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>α</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>PRE intervention scores</b>															
1. Positive leadership	4.26	0.92	0.94	1											
2. Positive climate	4.4	1	0.8	0.9**	1										
3. Positive relationships	4.23	1	0.76	0.9**	0.77**	1									
4. Positive communication	4.22	1	0.78	0.89**	0.77**	0.79**	1								
5. Creating positive meaning	4.39	0.91	0.71	0.84**	0.75**	0.68**	0.72**	1							
6. Positive strategies	4.05	1.29	0.86	0.85**	0.67**	0.7**	0.66**	0.59**	1						
7. Eudaimonic well-being	4.94	0.59	0.83	0.35**	0.36**	0.34**	0.24*	0.19	0.37**	1					
8. Hedonic well-being	3.32	0.76	0.64	0.03	0.55	-0.19	0.01	-0.07	0.11	0.81**	1				
9. Individual in-role performance	4.91	0.68	0.86	0.25*	0.29**	0.26*	0.11	0.23*	0.22*	0.46**	-0.12	1			
10. Individual extra-role performance	5	0.72	0.86	0.31**	0.40**	0.29**	0.19	0.24*	0.24*	0.52**	0.12	0.56**	1		
11. Group in-role performance	4.8	0.67	0.73	0.45**	0.37**	0.43**	0.44**	0.21	0.46**	0.64**	0.2	0.54**	0.55**	1	
12. Group extra-role performance	5	0.64	0.82	0.40**	0.42**	0.38**	0.33**	0.24*	0.37**	0.62**	0.19	0.59**	0.69**	0.8**	1
<b>POST intervention scores</b>															
1. Positive leadership	4.97	0.57	0.9	1											
2. Positive climate	4.98	0.68	0.85	0.93**	1										
3. Positive relationships	5	0.66	0.5	0.81**	0.68**	1									
4. Positive communication	5.08	0.66	0.73	0.84**	0.74**	0.74**	1								
5. Creating positive meaning	4.99	0.63	0.44	0.79**	0.69**	0.6**	0.51**	1							
6. Positive strategies	4.82	0.78	0.82	0.78**	0.73**	0.38*	0.53**	0.52**	1						
7. Eudaimonic well-being	5.21	0.52	0.87	0.45*	0.37	0.42*	0.22	0.43*	0.41*	1					
8. Hedonic well-being	3.38	0.78	0.74	0.30	0.24	0.29	0.20	0.22	0.29	0.88**	1				
9. Individual in-role performance	5.18	0.52	0.72	0.45*	0.38*	0.5**	0.31	0.33	0.35	0.77**	0.19	1			

10. Individual extra-role performance	5.26	0.60	0.88	0.44*	0.31	0.49**	0.37	0.4*	0.29	0.7**	0.39*	0.65**	1		
11. Group in-role performance	5.27	0.59	0.85	0.34	0.24	0.38*	0.35	0.3	0.15	0.61**	0.32	0.78**	0.66**	1	
12. Group extra-role performance	5.33	0.49	0.87	0.27	0.21	0.34	0.27	0.20	0.1	0.6**	0.36	0.7**	0.64**	0.83**	1

*Correlations; \*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .*

## **Performance.**

This variable was assessed with the Job performance subscale from the HERO (Healthy & Resilient Organizations) questionnaire (Salanova et al., 2012), adapted from the Goodman and Svyantek (1999) scale. The subscale consists of six items, and two different dimensions (in-role and extra-role performance) were measured, with six items in each at the individual level (i.e., I achieve the objectives of the job; I help when someone in the group is overworked), and six items at the group level (i.e., We perform all the functions and tasks demanded by the job; We perform roles that are not formally required but which improve the organizational reputation). Participants and employees evaluated their own levels of individual in- and extra-role performance, but only employees rated group in- and extra-role performance. All the items were rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree/never) to 6 (strongly agree/always).

## **Data Analyses**

First, the results of the evaluation were processed using the statistical program SPSS 25.0, carrying out a descriptive data analysis to examine the relationships between the study variables. Then, one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to analyse whether there were significant differences between the EX and WL-groups before the intervention took place. Next, a 2x2 repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to analyse differences between subjects (group: EX and WL) and within subjects, comparing T1 and T2 in order to test the effects of the intervention program. In this comparison, T1 refers to the first PRE-intervention assessment for both the EX and WL groups, whereas T2 refers to the POST-intervention assessment for the EX-group and the second PRE-intervention assessment for WL-group. For employees' scores, 2x2 repeated-measures could not be performed because responses were not identifiable, and so univariate analysis was applied to examine interaction effects by comparing the means between T1-T2 in each group (EX and WL) separately. To test differences between PRE and POST times for the

EX-group and PRE and POST times for the WL-group, paired-sample *t*-tests were implemented.

Moreover, once the WL-group had completed the intervention program, analyses considering the whole group (EX and WL-groups after the WL finished the intervention) were conducted to examine the differences between the PRE and POST evaluation times. For the leaders, *t*-tests of related samples were implemented to compare PRE and POST times using self-reported scores. A univariate analysis *t*-test comparing POST and PRE was calculated for differences in employees' scores because the data were not identifiable.

Finally, following Cohen (1988), Cohen's *d* was estimated as a measure of the effect size on *t*-tests of related samples for the intervention group results (small effect = 0.2; moderate effect = 0.5; large effect = 0.8). A significance level of 0.05 was established for all tests. Furthermore, *eta squared* was also calculated in the repeated-measures ANOVA (benchmarks to define effects: small = 0.01; medium = 0.06; and large = 0.14).

## Results

### Participants' scores

Table 2 presents participants' means, standard deviations, internal consistencies (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ), and correlations between the output variables on the PRE and POST scores for the whole intervention group (EX plus WL,  $N = 21$ ).

Next, one-factor ANOVA results indicated that there were no significant differences between the EX and WL-groups on the study variables at PRE intervention [positive leadership:  $F(1,19) = 0.04$ ;  $p = 0.58$ , *ns*; in-role performance:  $F(1,19) = 0.003$ ,  $p = 0.96$ , *ns*; extra-role performance:  $F(1,19) = 0.73$ ,  $p = 0.41$ , *ns*]. With these data, we proceeded to carry out the study with both groups included in the same sample.

### Positive leadership

**Repeated-measures ANOVA** for positive leadership showed a statistically significant time (T1, T2) x group (EX, WL) interaction effect [positive leadership:  $F(1,11) = 15.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$ ], indicating a medium-large effect size. The differences

demonstrated that the EX-group had significantly higher scores on positive leadership than the WL-group at T2 (immediately after the intervention for EX and before the intervention for WL) compared to T1 (before the intervention for both groups).

In addition, results considering each **positive leadership dimension** indicated a significant time (T1, T2) x group (EX, WL) interaction effect, [positive climate:  $F(1,11) = 4.5$ ,  $p = 0.06$ , (differences close to conventional significance  $p < 0.05$ ),  $\eta_p^2 = 0.12$ ; positive relationships:  $F(1,11) = 6.33$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$ ; positive communication:  $F(1,11) = 5.81$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$ ; creating positive meaning:  $F(1,11) = 2.82$ ,  $p = 0.12$ , *ns*; positive strategies:  $F(1,11) = 7.63$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$ ]. The differences demonstrated large effect sizes for positive climate and positive meaning, an intermediate effect for positive communication and positive strategies, and a small effect size for positive relationships. These results indicate that the intervention had a positive impact on the development of positive leadership skills after finishing the intervention program.

Next, **paired-sample t-tests** were performed on the EX-group to analyse differences from T1 to T2. Results showed significantly higher levels of positive leadership at T2 [ $t(7) = -4.74$   $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.87$ ], compared to T1, with large effect sizes, whereas paired sample *t*-tests for the WL-group indicated no significant differences from T1 to T2 [ $t(4) = 1.05$ ;  $p = 0.35$ , *ns*], as expected (see Table 4). Additionally, results for the positive leadership dimensions showed significant differences [positive climate: [ $t(7) = -2.55$   $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.69$ ]; positive relationships:  $t(7) = -3.04$   $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.75$ ; positive communication:  $t(7) = -3.21$   $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.77$ ; creating positive meaning:  $t(7) = -1.26$   $p = 0.25$ , *ns*; positive strategies:  $t(7) = -3.97$   $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.83$ ]. The differences demonstrated large effect sizes for positive relationships, positive communication, and positive strategies, intermediate effects for positive climate, and no significant differences for positive meaning. Overall, the results suggest that the intervention had a positive effect on the development of the participants' positive leadership skills and their dimensions.

**Table 4***T1 and T2 means and standard deviations (SD) for the EX and the WL*

	EX (N=8)				WL (N=5)			
	T1	T2	t-Value	p-Value	T1	T2	t-Value	p-Value
<b>Participants' scores</b>								
1. Positive leadership	4.03 (0.62)	4.78 (0.55)	-4.74	0.002	4.12 (0.74)	4.05 (0.68)	1.05	0.35
2. Positive climate	4 (0.53)	4.83 (0.56)	-2.55	0.038	4.73 (0.8)	4.67 (0.85)	1	0.374
3. Positive relationships	4.08 (0.77)	4.96 (0.72)	-3.04	0.019	4.07 (0.8)	4 (0.67)	1	0.374
4. Positive communication	4.13 (0.75)	4.88 (0.59)	-3.21	0.015	3.67 (0.97)	3.67 (0.88)	0	1
5. Creating positive meaning	4.5 (0.73)	4.79 (0.67)	-1.26	0.247	4.47 (1.28)	4.2 (0.96)	1.37	0.242
6. Positive strategies	3.46 (1,08)	4.46 (0.8)	-3.97	0.005	3.67 (1.03)	3.73 (1.04)	-0.53	0.621
7. In-role performance	4.71 (0.58)	5.13 (0.35)	-2.24	0.06	5 (0.62)	4.87 (0.51)	1.63	0.18
8. Extra-role performance	4.46 (0.83)	5.21 (0.5)	-3.47	0.01	5 (0.85)	4.93 (0.64)	0.41	0.70
<b>Employees' scores</b>								
1. Positive leadership	4.32 (0.85)	4.91 (0.64)	-2.91	0.032	4.25 (0.86)	3.93 (1.27)	1.02	0.316
2. Positive climate	4.45 (0.96)	4.92 (0.73)	-2.01	0.057	4.29 (0.9)	4.09 (1.32)	0.60	0.553
3. Positive relationships	4.28 (0.92)	5.05 (0.77)	-3.24	0.004	4.08 (0.92)	3.92 (1.44)	0.45	0.659
4. Positive communication	4.31 (1)	5.02 (0.82)	-2.77	0.012	4.09 (1.02)	3.79 (1.44)	0.91	0.371
5. Creating positive meaning	4.37 (0.91)	4.87 (0.69)	-2.3	0.032	4.41 (0.96)	4.35 (1.02)	0.22	0.827
6. Positive strategies	4.17 (1.15)	4.69 (0.76)	-2.08	0.049	4.37 (1.02)	3.48 (1.78)	2.18	0.042
7. Eudaimonic well-being	4.96 (0.6)	5.21 (0.36)	-1.98	0.058	5.15 (0.74)	4.87 (0.58)	1.49	0.142
8. Hedonic well-being	3.32 (0.51)	3.12 (0.51)	1.25	0.226	3.38 (0.82)	3.31 (0.97)	0.25	0.804
9. Individual in-role performance	4.89 (0.73)	5.26 (0.56)	- 2.05	0.053	4.8 (0.91)	5 (0.51)	-0.99	0.327
10. Individual extra-role performance	5.05 (0.67)	5.23 (0.39)	-1.34	0.192	4.98 (0.79)	4.84 (0.87)	0.56	0.579
11. Group in-role performance	4.82 (0.67)	5.31 (0.44)	-3.31	0.003	4.86 (0.84)	4.71 (0.68)	0.66	0.513
12. Group extra-role performance	5.02 (0.66)	5.31 (0.42)	-2.04	0.052	4.99 (0.71)	4.95 (0.6)	0.19	0.849

Furthermore, **paired-sample t-tests for the whole intervention** group, after WL completed the program, showed significantly higher levels of positive leadership at POST [ $t(13) = -7.73$   $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.91$ ], compared to PRE, with large effect sizes. Furthermore, results for the positive leadership dimensions indicated significant differences [positive climate: [ $t(13) = -3.72$   $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.72$ ; positive relationships:  $t(13) = -5.92$   $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.85$ ; positive communication:  $t(13) = -5.41$   $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.83$ ; creating positive meaning:  $t(13) = -3.04$   $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.64$ ; positive strategies:  $t(13) = -5.61$   $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.84$ ] with large effect sizes.

### **Individual Performance**

**Repeated-measures ANOVA** for individual performance showed a statistically significant time (T1, T2) x group (EX, WL) interaction effect [in-role performance:  $F(1,11) = 4.93$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.22$ ; extra-role performance:  $F(1,11) = 7.18$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.26$ ], with large effect sizes. The results revealed that the EX-group had significantly higher scores on these variables than the WL-group at T2 (immediately after the intervention for EX and before the intervention for WL), compared to T1 (before the intervention in both groups).

To examine differences from the T1 to T2 evaluations, **paired-sample t-tests** were conducted in the EX-group (see Table 2). Results indicated differences close to conventional significance ( $p < 0.05$ ) for in-role performance in this group from T1 to T2 [ $t(7) = -2.24$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ]. Additionally, results for extra-role performance at T2 [ $t(7) = -3.74$   $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.8$ ], compared to T1, indicated significantly higher levels, revealing large effect sizes, whereas paired sample *t*-tests in the WL-group indicated no significant differences from T1 to T2 [in-role performance:  $t(4) = 1.63$ ;  $p = 0.18$ , *ns*; extra-role performance:  $t(4) = 0.41$ ;  $p = 0.7$ , *ns*], as expected [Table 4 shows means and standard deviations for each variable across both groups at different times (T1 and T2)]. Finally, results of **paired-sample t-tests performed on the whole intervention** group (N = 21) after the WL group had completed the intervention program showed significantly higher levels at POST compared to PRE [in-role performance:  $t(13) = -4.84$   $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.8$ ; extra-role performance:  $t(13) = -4.89$   $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.8$ ], both with large effect sizes.

## Employees' scores

Table 3 presents employees' means, standard deviations, internal consistencies (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ), and correlations between the output variables on the PRE and POST scores for the whole intervention group (EX plus WL, N = 116).

### **Positive leadership**

In order to compare time factors for each group separately, **univariate analysis** of this variable was performed. Results showed that the EX-group had statistically significant higher scores on positive leadership skills at T2 [ $t(82) = -2.92, p < 0.05, d = 0.31$ ] compared with T1 (with a small effect size), whereas WL did not show significant differences from T1 to T2 [ $t(49) = 1.02, p = 0.316, ns$ ]. Furthermore, results considering each **positive leadership dimension** indicated significant differences [positive climate: [ $t(82) = -2.01, p < 0.05, d = 0.31$ ]; positive relationships:  $t(82) = -3.24, p < 0.05, d = 0.34$ ; positive communication:  $t(82) = -2.77, p < 0.05, d = 0.29$ ; creating positive meaning:  $t(82) = -2.3, p < 0.05, d = 0.25$ ; positive strategies:  $t(82) = 2.08, p < 0.05, d = 0.22$ ], demonstrating small to medium-large effect sizes for all dimensions. Additionally, results of univariate analyses of the **whole intervention group** indicated that positive leadership levels had significantly higher scores at POST compared to PRE [positive leadership:  $t(118) = -4.89, p < 0.001, d = 0.41$ ; positive climate: [ $t(118) = -3.46, p < 0.001, d = 0.30$ ]; positive relationships:  $t(118) = -4.71, p < 0.001, d = 0.4$ ; positive communication:  $t(118) = -5.19, p < 0.001, d = 0.43$ ; creating positive meaning:  $t(118) = -3.95, p < 0.001, d = 0.34$ ; positive strategies:  $t(118) = -3.78, p < 0.001, d = 0.34$ ], with small-medium effect sizes.

### **Eudaimonic and hedonic well-being**

A **univariate analysis** of this variable was carried out on employees' scores to compare the time factors in each group separately. Results indicated significant differences in the EX-group at T2 [eudaimonic well-being:  $t(80) = -1.98, p < 0.05, d = 0.22$ ], compared to T1, with small effect sizes. However, there were no significant differences in hedonic well-being [ $t(80) = 1.25, p = 0.226, ns$ ]. In the WL-group, there were no significant differences

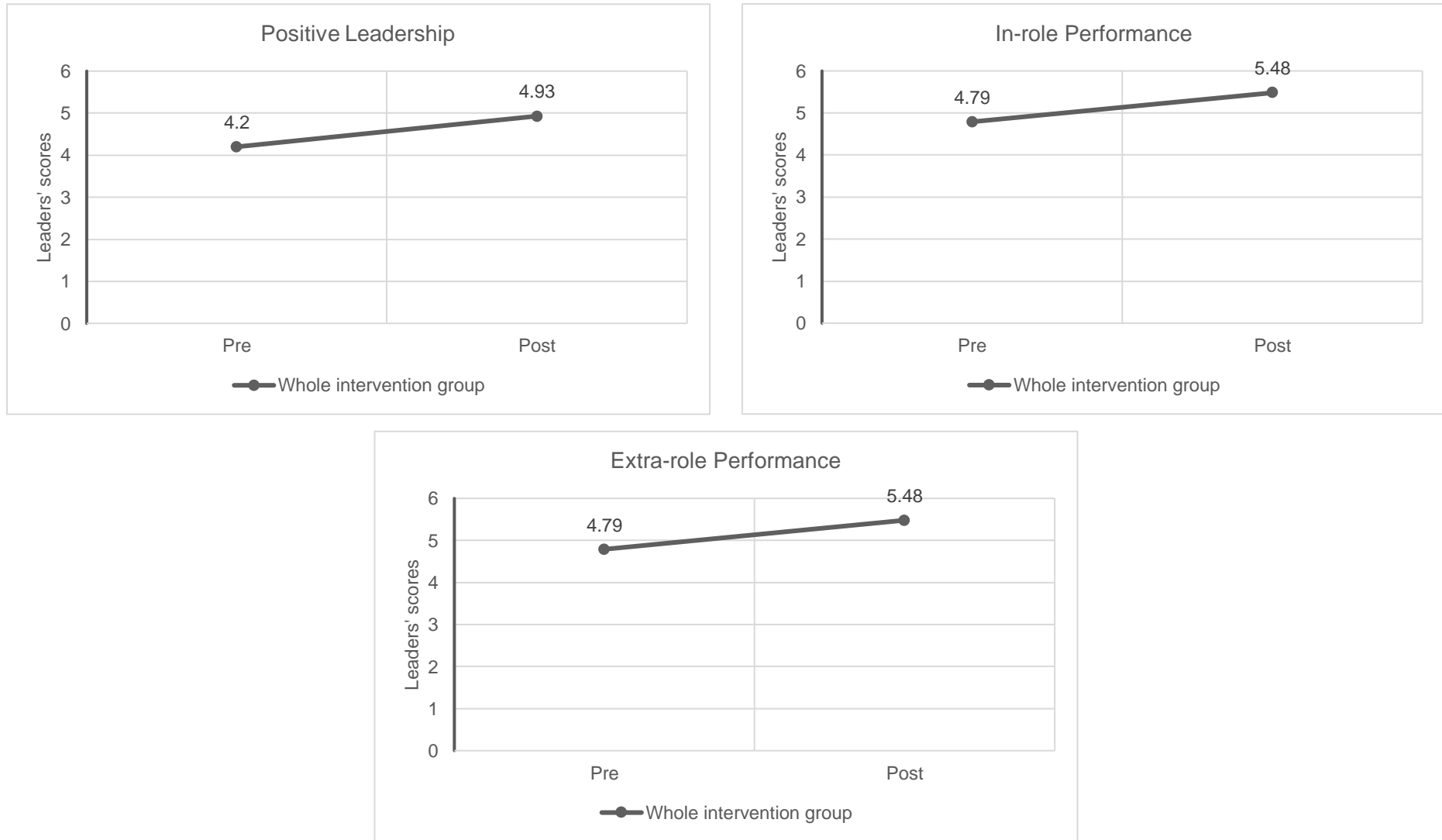


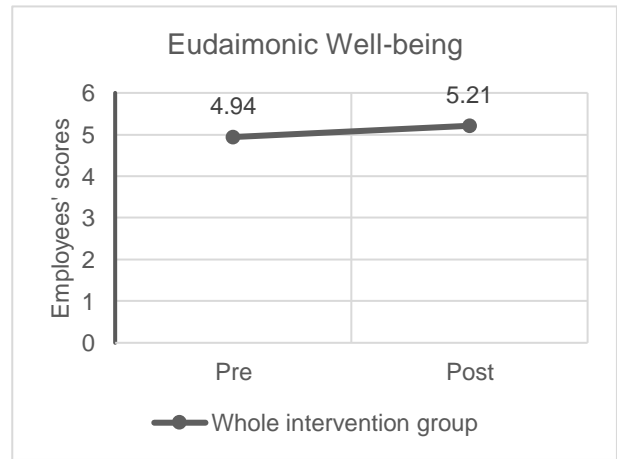
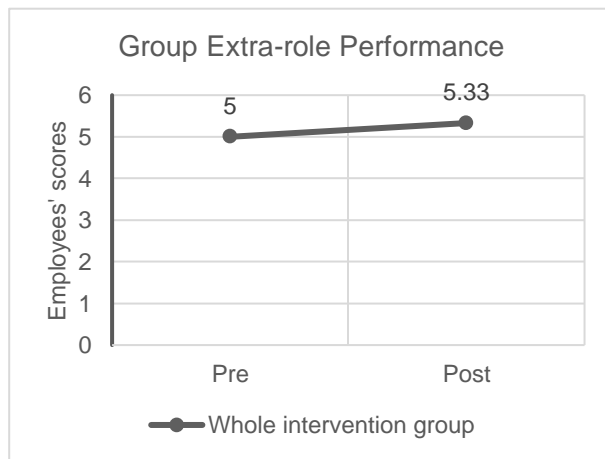
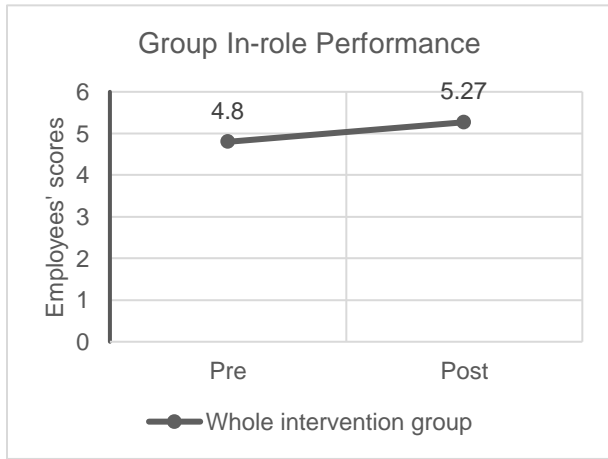
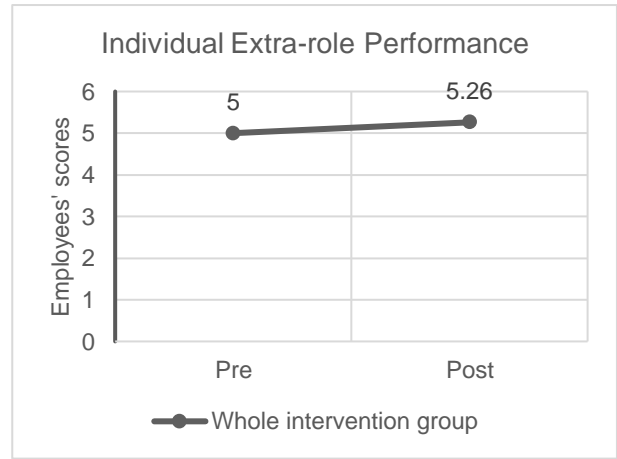
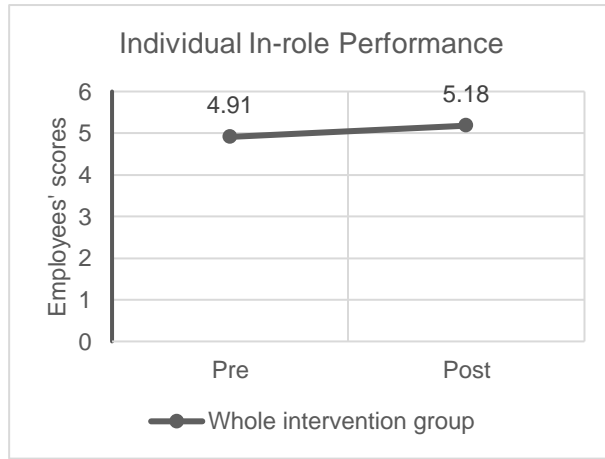
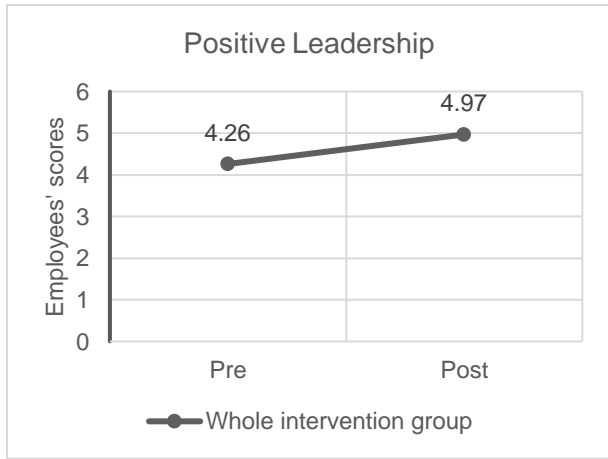
[eudaimonic well-being:  $t(46) = 1.32$ ,  $p = 0.193$ , *ns*; hedonic well-being:  $t(47) = 0.25$ ,  $p = 0.80$ , *ns*], as expected. Moreover, results of univariate analyses indicated that the **whole intervention group** had significantly higher scores on eudaimonic well-being at POST compared to PRE [ $t(116) = -2.36$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.21$ ], with small effect sizes, whereas there were no significant differences in the hedonic well-being scores [ $t(116) = -0.35$ ,  $p = 0.729$ , *ns*].

Figure 3 shows the study variables' plotted means for participants' and employees' scores in the whole intervention group.

**Figure 3**

*Positive leadership, in-role and extra-role performance, eudaimonic happiness in the whole intervention group across time.*





## **Individual Performance**

**Univariate analysis** of this variable was carried out on employees' scores to compare the time factors for each group separately. Findings showed significant differences in in-role performance in the EX-group at T2 [ $t(82) = -2.05, p < 0.05, d = 0.22$ ], with a small effect size, and no significant differences in extra-role performance [ $t(82) = -1.33, p = 0.192, ns$ ] compared to T1. WL-group results did not differ significantly from T1 to T2 [in-role performance:  $t(47) = -0.99, p = 0.327, ns$ ; extra-role performance:  $t(47) = -1.56, p = 0.579, ns$ ], as expected. Moreover, results of univariate analyses indicated that the **whole intervention group** had significantly higher scores at POST compared to PRE [in-role performance:  $t(115) = -2.15, p < 0.05, d = 0.2$ ;], with small effect sizes, and no differences in extra-role performance  $t(115) = -1.91, p = 0.062$  (differences close to conventional significance  $p < 0.05$ ).

## **Group performance**

To compare the time factors in each group separately, **univariate analysis** of the performance variable was performed on employees' scores. Results showed significant differences in the EX-group at T2 compared to T1 [in-role performance:  $t(82) = -3.31, p < 0.05, d = 0.34$ ; and extra-role performance:  $t(82) = -2.04, p < 0.05, d = 0.22$ ], with small effect sizes. The WL-group did not differ significantly from T1 to T2 [in-role performance:  $t(47) = -0.66, p = 0.513, ns$ ; extra-role performance:  $t(47) = -0.19, p = 0.849, ns$ ], as expected. Furthermore, results of univariate analyses indicated that the **whole intervention group** had significantly higher scores at POST compared to PRE [in-role performance:  $t(115) = -3.62, p < 0.001, d = 0.32$ ; extra-role performance:  $t(115) = -2.87, p < 0.05, d = 0.26$ ;], with small effect sizes.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a Strengths-based Leadership Coaching program in improving leaders' positive leadership skills, employees' eudaimonic well-being, and job performance (in- and extra-role) at the individual and team levels. Overall, the findings supported the proposed hypotheses and revealed that the

intervention program is a valuable tool to foster participants' outcome variables (self-reported and perceived by their employees) after finishing the intervention. In other words, leaders improved their positive leadership skills and their dimensions, employees increased their levels of eudaimonic well-being, and both leaders and employees increased their job performance.

This study makes various contributions to the strengths-based coaching development literature. First, it confirms Hypothesis 1 because we found a positive effect of a Strengths-based Leadership Coaching intervention on increasing the levels of leaders' positive leadership skills and their dimensions (i.e., positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, creating positive meaning, positive strategies) after participating in the program, when comparing the EX and WL groups and when considering the whole intervention group. Positive leadership is gaining attention among managers and academics, making in-depth research on positive leadership more necessary. Previous research has shown that coaching interventions can help individuals enhance their personal and professional skills, increase their self-awareness, and improve their emotional self-regulation (Rekalde et al., 2015). In addition, psychological coaching can help leaders bond with their team members and build a more positive work environment. Our study demonstrates the positive effects of the Strengths-based Leadership Coaching program on the development of positive leadership skills, addressing Malinga et al.'s (2019) request for additional research on positive leadership.

Second, regarding the effects of the program on employees' eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, the results supported Hypotheses 2a and 2b; that is, employees' levels of eudaimonic well-being were higher in the EX-group at T2 compared to T1 and when considering the whole intervention group, whereas the levels of hedonic well-being did not increase. The results are in line with the perspective of the goal-oriented approach in the Strengths-based Coaching process because it takes more effort to pursue goals related to eudaimonic well-being than to hedonic well-being (Vittersø, 2016). In the organizational context, leadership styles and behaviours have a significant impact on the emotional and

psychological well-being of the employees (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020; Walsh & Arnold, 2020). Leaders who show positive behaviour can contribute to promoting employees' well-being (Berger et al., 2019). Additionally, the findings are consistent with an earlier study (Peiró et al., 2019) that indicates that eudaimonia paths are more effective in achieving job performance than hedonia paths.

Third, the results for leaders' individual performance corroborated Hypothesis 3a. After completing the program (at T2; immediately after the intervention for the EX-group and before the intervention for the WL-group), levels of in-role and extra-role performance were higher in the EX-group compared to the WL-group and to T1 (before the intervention for both groups). Additionally, scores of the entire intervention group were significantly higher after the program than before it. The findings corroborate prior meta-analyses pointing to positive coaching outcomes, such as job performance (Jones et al., 2016; Theeboom et al., 2014). Moreover, several controlled studies have shown the positive effects of workplace coaching on job performance (Gabriel et al., 2014; Jarosz, 2021; Peláez et al., 2020).

Regarding employees' levels of individual in- and extra-role performance, findings showed higher levels of in-role performance in the EX-group at T2 (confirming Hypothesis 3b) and no significant differences in extra-role performance compared to T1 and the WL-group (not confirming Hypothesis 3c). These findings can be explained by the impact of a leader's skills on employee performance, specifically on task-related duties. It may have taken more time to fully integrate and consolidate behaviours that exceeded the position's requirements. The findings are consistent with previous research that shows a link between leaders' skills and task-related performance and employees' job performance (Sonmez Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020). Furthermore, employees' levels of group in- and extra-role performance also increased as a result of the leader's development in the EX-group after the intervention (from T1 to T2) and compared to the WL-group, as well as in the whole intervention group when comparing POST and PRE times. These findings are in line with previous studies showing that a leader's positive behaviours and attitudes not only energize the leader, but they also motivate the team to work toward their goals (Ramdas & Patrick, 2019). However,

investigations on the impact of the positive leadership style on employees' individual and group job performance is still lacking, and so our study contributes to the coaching-based leadership literature by examining this relationship.

Studies examining the impact of coaching-based leadership interventions on leaders' in-role and extra-role performance are still scarce. As Burt and Talati (2017) suggested, our study contributes to and extends this element to the coaching-based leadership literature by assessing the influence of coaching-based leadership interventions on leaders' performance within and outside the workplace. More precisely, the intervention appears to be a beneficial strategy for increasing the productivity of leaders and their teams. Furthermore, the results also contribute to the strengths-based coaching literature, emphasizing the strong link between strengths use and performance (Dubreuil et al., 2016; Hodges & Asplund, 2010; Miglianico et al., 2020).

Moreover, the results also support previous research suggesting that Strengths-based Leadership Coaching (short-term and positively oriented) can be an effective and helpful intervention for improving work-related outcomes and well-being, even when the number of coaching sessions is limited (Corbu et al., 2021; Peláez et al., 2020; Theeboom et al., 2014). Finally, this investigation fills a gap in the literature by carrying out empirical control trial studies with longitudinal designs that consider both employees' and managers' perspectives (Grant & O'Connor, 2018).

### **Implications for Practice**

Findings have shown that Strengths-based Leadership Coaching interventions can help leaders enhance their leadership skills and performance. Additionally, organizations would benefit from implementing these interventions for their leaders because they would boost employees' job performance (individual and group) and well-being. This study employed a consistent empirical approach to evaluate the behaviours and skills related to a positive leadership style in the workplace and its impact on the psychological well-being of employees, resulting in increased performance (Wright & Cropanzano, 2007). There are

many challenges facing organizations today that require a strong leader who can inspire and support employees while building a positive climate for the team's and organization's growth. Complex interactions between positive and negative components of human functioning (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016) influence people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The coaching process should include these factors in order to provide the coach with resources to manage difficulties (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

Additionally, the findings provide empirical evidence showing the potential benefits of executive strengths-based leadership coaching in improving positive leadership skills, thus enhancing our theoretical knowledge about its beneficial effects on work-related outcomes (i.e., in-role and extra-role performance). Moreover, short coaching sessions are advantageous for organizations with demanding environments, in terms of engagement, flexibility, and affordability, because they focus on specific goals and the process is straightforward. The results also contribute to the "Happy and productive theory" by considering employee group performance and taking a step forward in the study of positive leadership and its impact on well-being (Gladis, 2013; Zbierowski, 2016).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

There are certain limitations to the study. First, strict randomization of the groups (EX and WL) was not achievable due to organizational priorities, participant availability, and participants' schedules. However, one-factor ANOVA results revealed no significant differences between the EX and WL groups on the study variables at PRE intervention.

Second, because the sample size was small and specific to the automobile industry, the findings may not be representative of all organizations or contexts. Nonetheless, prior research has established that a small sample size can influence statistical significance (Cumming, 2014). Based on this hypothesis, the majority of the observed effects were substantial, with moderate to large effect sizes. Future research should examine how this intervention affects different sectors or industries and broaden the sample to compare the outcomes.



Third, due to organizational constraints, no follow-up measurement was possible; hence, the intervention's long-term impacts were not examined, and the findings should be referred with caution. Moreover, future research should include follow-up coaching sessions to ensure that the outcome variables are maintained and optimized throughout time.

Fourth, the study used self-report measures, which may have resulted in some measurement bias, and so it was difficult for the researchers to objectively verify the data. Self-reported measurement could increase individuals' social desirability (Caputo, 2017). Furthermore, although participation was entirely voluntary, the level of knowledge and motivation of the participants may have influenced our findings. However, the findings are consistent with the theory, and by collecting data over time, we tried to reduce the effect of these biases in our investigation (i.e., before and after times). Furthermore, we used hetero evaluation (i.e., leaders and employees) of our variables in order to mitigate common variance bias. Objective methods, such as different evaluation times, should be considered in future research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of strengths-based leadership coaching on leadership skills.

Finally, to the authors' knowledge, research on positive leadership development through short-term, strengths-based coaching using a randomized control design is still scarce. Although our findings supported our hypotheses, as a complementary approach, it would be interesting for future studies to include diary studies in order to obtain relevant information about the underlying psychological mechanisms that can affect the outcome variables (i.e., PsyCap, work engagement). To further understand the impact of the intervention on teams' efficacy, future research could also incorporate a measure of team satisfaction.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Positive Psychological Coaching Effectiveness:**

#### **A Systematic Review**

##### **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 psychology coaching programs. A systematic review of the literature utilizing specific keywords gathered from four bibliographic databases yielded 505 records. All of 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 psychology coaching incorporated into the study. These consisted of fourteen peer-reviewed journal papers and one doctoral dissertation. Our findings confirm that positive psychology coaching benefits both individual individuals and organizations 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.

*Keywords:* positive psychological coaching, coaching effectiveness, strengths-based coaching, intervention, systematic review

Positive Psychology (PP) is a branch of psychology that emerged late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Snyder et al., 2016) and aims to study the optimal functioning of people and organizations (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) by focusing on their character strengths and positive characteristics and allowing them to achieve their full potential (Salanova et al., 2019b). Positive psychology is based on the idea that building on our strengths is a more effective path to success than weaknesses; 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 becomes necessary to strengthen and even positively transform one's personal resources (Wong, 2020, p. 3).

Individual strengths have been one of the focuses of positive psychology research. The ability of an individual to behave, think, and feel authentically and energetically can be defined a strength since it allows the person to function, develop, and grow to their full potential (Linley, 2008; Linley & Harrington, 2006). Strengths-based approach is one of the PP's main pillars since it offers theoretical framework, empirical validation and methodology consistency (Seligman et al., 2005). The discipline can be understood as a strengths-based psychology based on the humanistic premise that people are essentially healthy, capable and in desire to pursue meaningful and satisfying lives (Positive Psychology Center, 2016).

In an organizational setting, individuals who strive to use their strengths daily are more productive and happier (Miglianico et al., 2020) and it can be trained for example from Positive Psychological Interventions (PPIs). In that sense, Burke (2018) argued that using strengths questionnaires in coaching practice is a fundamental element of Positive Psychological Coaching (PPC). There are evidence-based activities designed to boost wellbeing (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 PPI to be considered such: (1) an emphasis on positive elements; (2) a positive outcome; and (3) a focus to improve wellness rather than treat disease. The recent meta-analysis by Carr et al. (2021) shows that

evidence-based interventions like PPIs 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 organizational context, Meyers et al. (2013) found that PPIs improve employees' well-being and performance.

An applied area where character strengths is used in Coaching Psychology refers to the development of an individual's intrinsic capacity for growth through a learning process adapted to their needs (Gallwey, 2014). This can be achieved by fostering a collaborative, introspective, and goal-oriented relationship (Smither, 2011). In organizational settings, the intervention is targeted at all-level employees (i.e., coachees) who work with professionals (i.e., coaches) to accomplish specific work-related goals (Bozer & Jones, 2018) by unlocking coachees' potential and strengths (Passmore & Lai, 2019). Moreover, Coaching Psychology is close to PP principles because together supply the psychological nutrients that nurture workplace well-being, engagement, and individual development (Boniwell et al., 2021). Thus, PPC emerged as a methodology grounded in PP principles, and it is defined by van Zyl et al. (2020) as follows:

A short- to medium-term professional, collaborative relationship between a client and coach, aimed at the identification, utilization, optimisation and development of personal/psychological strengths and resources in order to enhance positive states, traits and behaviours. Utilizing Socratic goal setting and positive psychological evidence-based approaches facilitate personal/professional growth, optimal functioning, enhanced wellbeing, the actualization of people's potential and aid in coping with work-demands. (p. 11)

Workplace positive coaching is a well-established practice in human resource development (Bozer & Delegach, 2019), as it is one of the fastest-growing industries and professions on a global scale (ICF, 2020). Numerous randomized controlled trials (e.g., Corbu et al., 2021; De Haan et al., 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 broader concept that involves coaching delivered by coaching professionals to all levels of employees in the organization in an effort to enhance learning and development (Bozer & Jones., 2018).

In relation to elements that determine workplace effectiveness (i.e., antecedents), previous literature suggest that variables regarding to the coach, coachee, their relationship, and the coaching process itself are 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 the coach, performance/skills of the coach (de Haan et al., 2013), coach credibility (Bozer et al., 2014); as for the coachee, self-efficacy (Corbu et al., 2020; de Haan et al., 2013; Evers et al., 2006), coaching motivation and readiness of the coachee (Rekalde et al., 2015), goal orientation (Bozer et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2016); as for the importance of the relationship between them: satisfactory relationship (Carter et al., 2017), interpersonal attraction (de Haan et al., 2013), trust and rapport (Cox, 2012; de Haan & Gannon, 2017); and as for the process itself: feedback intervention (Nieminen et al., 2013; Sonesh et al., 2015).

In terms of underlying mechanisms, Grover and Furnham (2016) presented a systematic review showing that there is a lack of investigation that examine the interaction between variables related to underlying mechanisms of effective coaching with a few exceptions (Baron & Morin, 2009; de Haan et al., 2013; Sonesh, Coultas, Lacerenza, 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 coachee and coach inputs (i.e., coachee 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 organizations because it guides in determining how to implement coaching and ensuring that the coaching intervention is as effective as feasible.

Regarding the benefits of workplace coaching intervention, 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 (Grant et al, 2009; Corbu et al., 2020;), managerial behaviour (Ballesteros-Sánchez, 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Rekalde et al., 2017), leadership skills (Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020;). Overall, workplace coaching is a valuable methodology that helps individuals and organizations 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 review that focuses on PPC specifically in an organizational setting, and analyses 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 understand the mechanisms that have been investigated as potential explanations for the intervention's success; and (3) to determine whether it is effective as a workplace intervention and its specific benefits (i.e., outcomes) for the employees and organizations. To address the research objectives, we conducted a systematic review of the PPC research to summarize the findings of investigations 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, synthesizing, 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 are not yet documented in the scientific literature.

## **Search Strategy**

In order to identify, evaluate, and synthesize 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 psycholog\* coaching", "positive coaching", "strengths-based coaching", "strengths coaching"), and (2) secondary terms (process OR program 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 terms and boolean terms (e.g., "positive psychology\* coaching" AND process OR program OR intervention OR measure OR action OR technique impact OR influence OR evaluation OR effectiveness OR efficacy OR effect), and then a "documents types" and "languages" filter was added. Using this search strategy, 505 titles were identified.

## **Eligibility Criteria**

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

In terms of exclusion criteria, were excluded: (1) articles focusing on instrument development; (2) studies based on intervention centered 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 gathered to establish the research question, clarify concepts, determine the search terms, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Then, two of the authors (a.k.a., reviewers) conducted the search and review of the articles independently following the search strategy and eligibility criteria; the results were shared and discussed. This was done to guarantee that no records were omitted throughout the selection procedure (Moher et al., 2009). Afterwards, the other two authors (a.k.a., judges) settled the doubts regarding the studies in disagreement between the reviewers, and all four authors made the final decision regarding which articles are finally included in the review.

## **Study Selection and Synthesis**

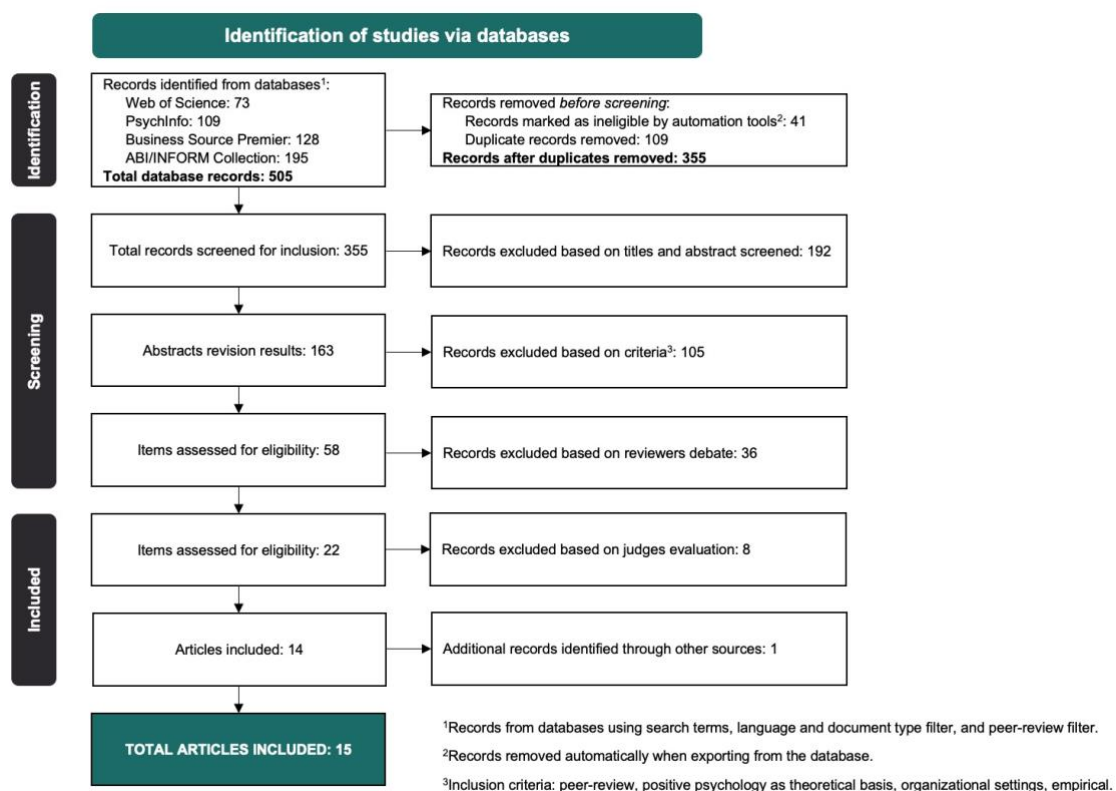
For this review, the search in the databases was conducted applying the selection criteria 1 (language), and 2 (peer-reviewed papers and/or doctoral theses). The initial search resulted in 72 items in Web of Science, 101 items in PsychInfo, 114 items in Business Source Premier and 177 items in ABI/Inform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

Next, 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 passed to the next phase based on the eligibility criteria leaving 9 selected, 32 doubtful and 28 excluded for the first reviewer, and 16 selected, 7 doubtful and 71 excluded for the second reviewer. 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 10 articles in agreement. The judges evaluated and resolved the doubts, and then all authors made the final decision on how many of the 13 were added to the 10 already chosen. A total of 15 studies were included in the final selection. Items



were most often disqualified because they were theoretical work (i.e., not peer-reviewed papers or doctoral dissertations), followed by studies based on coaching interventions in areas such as life, sports, education, health, and clinical coaching. Not being coaching interventions was the third most prevalent reason for article exclusion, followed by literature reviews and meta-analyses. The fifth most common reason for article exclusion was that studies were not conducted in a working setting.

With the final articles chosen, data was 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 to store, and categorize the articles, Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet to manage the references and review them, and Rayyan software for the assessment of the judges. Figure 1 shows the flow diagram, which represents the search and retrieval process.



**Figure 1**

*Flow diagram of selected studies*

## 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 Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020; van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2008), and one doctoral dissertation (Parsons, 2016) study. 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) underlying mechanisms; and 4) PPC outcomes research. Table 2 summarizes the main findings categorized into the themes of this systematic review.

### 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 carried out 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 range of publication years was from 2007 to 2022, with the majority released within the previous decade.

Qualitative empirical surveys accounted for the majority of these papers ( $N = 7$ ), while six papers used a quantitative approach ( $N = 6$ ). Two papers employed a mixed-approach strategy that combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Moreover, 11 were non-experimental, 4 were quasi-experimental, and 7 used a longitudinal study design, of which 4 included pre-post-follow-up design (Corbu et al., 2020; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; Peláez et al., 2020; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020;). Data for the qualitative research were gathered using semi-structured interviews ( $N = 7$ ). Generally, the publications used self-report data ( $N = 10$ ), 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 participants, data collection, rating sources, and analysis, are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1***Characteristics of the studies (up to May 2022) (N = 15)*

<b>Nº</b>	<b>Author/year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Method/Design</b>	<b>Data collection</b>	<b>Rating sources</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
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 2x2 repeated measures Paired-sample <i>t</i> -test Simple linear regression Grounded theory
2	Elston & Boniwell (2011)	UK	6 participants	Qualitative	3 semi-structured interviews	Self-report	
3	Fontes & 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 2x2 repeated measures Conditional process analysis using 95% bootstrap (CI) with 5,000 bootstrap samples Critical case sampling Coding Charting and Mapping Response rate (percentages)
4	Guzmán et al. (2017)	UK	28 staff	Qualitative Focus group	Semi-structured interviews	Resident Staff Relative Interns Coaches	
5	Kakarala et al. (2018)	US	21 participants (12 interns; 9 coaches)	Quantitative Longitudinal	Baseline-FUP		
6	Moin & 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 2x2 repeated measures Univariate analysis Paired-sample <i>t</i> -tests

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	Themes and percentages (qualitative). ANOVA with 2x2 repeated measures Univariate analysis Paired-sample <i>t</i> -tests Interpretive content analysis: coding and frequencies per category.
11	Sparrow (2007)	UK	51 organizations	Quantitative	Cross sectional survey analyses	Self-report	One way ANOVA Post hoc multiple comparisons of means Paired-sample <i>t</i> -test
12	Toogood (2012)	UK	6 participants	Qualitative	In-depth interviews Semi-structured interview	Self-report	IPA
13	Van der Walt & 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 (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

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## Antecedents

Six studies identified the antecedents of coaching results as being a significant aspect of the process (Corbu et al., 2020; Elston & Boniwell, 2011; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; Moin & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Toogood, 2012; van der Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020). The majority of the studies (N = 4) were qualitative and employed semi-structured interviews to conduct an interpretive 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., 2020; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021). Corbu et al. (2020) evaluated an antecedent (i.e., **goal-related self-efficacy**) as a predictor of the coaching outcome (i.e., goal attainment) following a controlled trial design with measurements at three time points to confirm the impact of the variable on the coachees' performance during the coaching process. Fontes & 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 setting** at the beginning of the intervention sets the stage; reconsidering failures and negative events attribution during the coaching sessions; and the **coaches' active role**, particularly delivering feedback, throughout the intervention phases are critical variables for increasing psychological capital and, thereby, functioning as a mediator for 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 **coachees' strengths** is an effective approach that contributes positively to their personal and professional development. Elston and Bowell (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

that previously burdened the use of them presented as mediating factors in the study (i.e., self-concept, commitment, organizational fit). Toogood (2012) also observed, from the perspective of the coaches who employed the strengths-based approach, that a focus on the **coachees' strengths** could lead to a greater level of fulfilment for both the coach and the coachee. Using phenomenological analysis to examine data from in-depth semi-structured interviews, it shows 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 of 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) indicate the efficacy of **employing a strengths-based approach** (i.e., recognizing and building on existing strengths during coaching) to raise leaders' consciousness of integrity and achieve positive outcomes. The authors suggest that underlying mechanisms through which strengths awareness and development lead to positive leader outcomes such as acting consistently, experimenting with new behaviours, and self-examination to support immediate change.

In the remaining study, Moin & van Nieuwerburgh (2021) found that facing one's **unconscious bias** is challenging but necessary for increasing self-awareness and building a **trusted coaching relationship**, which resulted 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 pre-requisites activities involving online Unconscious Bias Training (UBT) and the results from the completion of the Implicit Association Test (IAT) followed by Positive Psychology Coaching (PPC); the data was analysed by conducting an interpretive 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, it was found that 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 & 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 **organizational** (i.e., positive organizational fit, commitment) **factors**.

Elston & Boniwell (2011) investigated the efficacy and benefits of strengths-based coaching using grounded theory analyses, concentrating on the experience of 6 women coachees from a financial service. Findings indicated that certain factors affected how much participants used their strengths. In other 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 emotion, 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 & 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, recognizing 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 doing the right thing consistently, experimenting with change, and the impact of self-reflection to support immediate change. On a quasi-experimental study with professionals working in a digital marketing agency, Fontes & 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 organizational 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, it was discovered that multiple underlying mechanisms could explain the outcomes. **Changes in the goal attainment, self-insight, and role breadth self-efficacy suggested that a coaching program** with a primary focus on developing these mechanisms is likely to be more successful.

**Table 2**

*Summary of antecedents, underlying mechanisms and outcomes (up to May 2022) (N = 15)*

<b>Nº</b>	<b>Author/year</b>	<b>Antecedents</b>	<b>Underlying mechanisms</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
1	Corbu et al. (2021)	Goal-Related Self-Efficacy	N/A	Psychological Capital, Goal Attainment
2	Elston & Boniwell (2011)	Identification, deliberated use of strengths, and strengths as “authentic parts of themselves”.	Self-concept. Commitment. Positive attitude. Organizational 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 & Dello Russo (2021)	Goal setting. Reformulating failure attribution. Coaches’ feedback.	Psychological Capital.	Psychological Capital. Job satisfaction. Organizational 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 & 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.
9	Peláez et al. (2020)	N/A	N/A	Resolution of work and life challenges over time. Work engagement. Job performance.

10	Peláez Zuberbühler et al. (2020)	N/A	N/A	Goal attainment. Self-awareness. Strength's identification and development. Job satisfaction. Well-being. 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 organizational outcomes.
12	Toogood (2012)	Strengths-based approach. Identification, use and focus of strengths. Client-led (importance of client readiness). Conscious awareness of strengths.	N/A	Faster personal growth. Efficient and joyful goal attainment. Sense of authenticity. Broader perspective and choices. Confidence. Coaches' well-being and satisfaction. Fulfillment.
13	Van der Walt & 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 (2021)	N/A	N/A	Valuing opportunity for safe reflection. Increasing awareness. Alleviation of negative emotions. Re-energized 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.

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## Outcomes

All 15 selected studies proposed and tested outcomes variables related to participating or based on experiences from PPC. After analysing the data collected, results from the 15 selected studies have been classified based on the type of outcomes: (1) **well-being related outcomes** (i.e., psychological capital, the value of strengths, hope, self-efficacy, 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, organizational 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; lower 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.

The majority of the 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, 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 program aimed at enhancing the work behaviours and well-being of nursing managers in a health-care 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 health-care professionals, Palamara et al., (2015) evaluated a program to support intern professional development through positive psychology coaching. Results

demonstrated **less emotional exhaustion and burnout** on participants than reported before the intervention program. 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 organizations. Coaching has significantly less impact upon **entrepreneurship and social purpose outcomes** than 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 psychology 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 Wrap-up) in improving **staff–resident relationships (i.e., communication), and enhancing happiness and hope**. More recently, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis design study van Nieuwerburgh (2021) provided insight into how PPC implemented to six financial services 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 methods designs to test their objectives. In one of these studies, Kakarala et al (2018) implemented a development coaching program in health-care 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 control trial and interpretative content analysis, Peláez et al. (2020) designed and tested a Strengths-based micro-Coaching intervention with 60 employees from an automotive industry company, and findings revealed an increase on their levels of **work engagement, job performance, goal**

**attainment, self-awareness, strengths identification and development, and job satisfaction and well-being.**

Following a similar study design, Peláez Zuberbühler et al. (2020) designed and tested a Coaching-based leadership intervention program with 41 managers from the industry sector, and results indicated 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.**

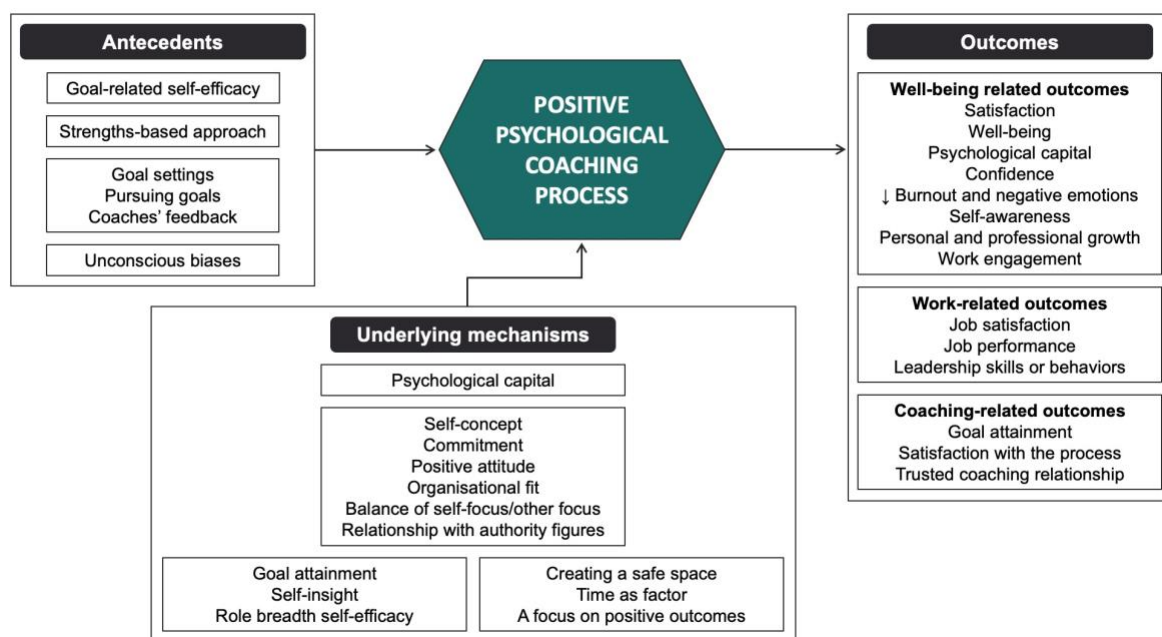
From the 15 selected studies, only 6 of them (Corbu et al., 2021; Elston & Boniwell, 2011; Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021; Moin & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Toogood, 2021; van der Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020) included antecedents or underlying mechanisms to explain how PPC exert its influence on well-being and work-related outcomes. All these studies have been described on previous sections. Using a qualitative design, Elston & Boniwell (2011) showed how important antecedent 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, positive reflections** from others. Also based on qualitative methods, Toogood (2021) demonstrated how awareness, identification and use of strengths enhance faster **personal growth, easier and more enjoyable goal attainment, a broader perspective, confidence, self-belief, and a sense of authenticity, and a greater sense of fulfilment.** Following a similar methodology, van der Walt & 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, Moin & van Nieuwerburgh (2021) study revealed important outcomes of a PPC intervention, such as introspection and reflexivity, enhanced **self-awareness, increased self-efficacy, motivation to improve self, and trusted coaching relationship.** The two reminding 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**. On the other hand, Fontes & Dello Russo (2021) findings showed a positive effect of a coaching intervention on psychological capital, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job performance, being these outcomes mediated by psychological capital.

## Discussion and Future Directions

This systematic review aimed to broaden understanding of the effectiveness of PPC by systematically integrating previous empirical research on (1) the factors that contribute to the intervention's success (i.e., antecedents); (2) the 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 (i.e., outcomes). This section provides a synthesis, practical implications, and future research directions based on an examination of 15 research papers for the central themes highlighted in the review.

Figure 2 illustrates a summary of the most relevant PPC success factors (i.e., antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and outcomes).



**Figure 2**

*Summary of the study's results*

## Study characteristics

Over the different studies covered in this review, a range of samples, methods, sources of data, and analyses were employed. In spite of the many positive aspects (i.e., variety of samples, diverse sectors, sources of data and analyses), the studies also included a number of drawbacks that needed to be considered. First, the majority of studies reported a qualitative or quantitative methodology, and 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 four of the longitudinal studies that used quantitative or mixed-methods designs employed a random sampling methodology. Hence, randomized control trials might be required in future research to examine the effectiveness of PPC interventions within organizations. Lastly, most of the studies were conducted at the individual level and relied on self-reported data for their analyses. Multilevel analysis and a 360-degree format are two methods that could be explored further to improve study design. Grover and Furnham (2016, p. 26) argue that "as an industry, coaching requires more rigorous methodology, statistical analysis, and larger sample sizes in order 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 interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) shed 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, recognizing 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 findings while still yielding useful information for present and future applications (van Nieuwerburgh, 2021).



## Antecedents

The findings of this systematic review showed that only six studies had addressed the antecedents of coaching as a substantial part of the process. Initial efforts to progress toward the drivers of coaching success are encouraging. The strengths-based approach was the most prevalent one used in the coaching process that positively impacted the personal and professional development of individuals. Variables such as the value of leveraging strengths at work; the identification and deliberate use of strengths; the emphasis on strengths in the coaching process; and conscious awareness and application of strengths all contribute to positive outcomes (i.e., greater level of fulfilment for both the coach and the coachee; positive emotions). These findings are consistent with earlier research indicating that, in an organizational setting, individuals who aim to apply their strengths daily are more productive and happier (Miglianico et al., 2020). Regarding the two quantitative studies, 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. On the basis of the RE-GROW model, it was determined that goal-directed interventions and self-efficacy are a key requirement for coaching performance (de Haan et al., 2013). Moreover, some authors have indicated that a shift in mindset and abilities is the essential to coaching effectiveness (Theeboom et al., 2017), and this notion has been latent in coaching practice for some time. Setting 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 fact that the investigations followed a proper research design, additional research is required to replicate the results and broaden the body of literature.

Although, in general, promising results were obtained, several limitations associated with the selected studies should be taken into account. First, four of the six studies used an IPA technique that requires confirmation, for example, through the traditional randomized controlled trials to examine what works or employing the Realist Evaluation approach

(Nielsen & Miraglia, 2017) to pursue an accurate and holistic evaluation considering for whom, when, and in what context interventions produce 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 under which circumstances 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 more likely accurate version of the scenario.

### **Underlying mechanisms**

Research findings from the four studies examining the relationship between antecedents and outcome variables revealed positive results when mediation was considered. Throughout the studies, a variety of personal characteristics were considered and analysed at the individual level. Personal (i.e., psychological capital, positive attitude, self-concept, focus on positive outcomes, self-insight, goal attainment, motivation) as well as organizational (i.e., positive organizational fit, commitment) aspects were found to play mediating roles between the coaching intervention and positive outcomes. Concerns that organizations 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 it refers 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 serve as a powerful catalyst for change (Grant, 2017b; Grant & O'Connor, 2018).

This review's findings demonstrated an upward tendency 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 time points, and only one collected a follow-up measure. To evaluate if the effects of coaching are sustained or perhaps manifest themselves after some time, future research should focus on gathering data at various time points and for longer periods of time following intervention (e.g., one year). 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 organizational fit, commitment) that were examined. However, the results of the qualitative investigations still need to be validated by a realist evaluation approach or randomized control trial, and subsequent studies should duplicate these findings in order to build a strong body of evidence (Schmidt, 2009). Third, we suggest conducting multilevel research that takes into account both the unit and organizational levels of analysis (i.e., team and organizational-related performance, productivity, achievement of organizational goals, etc.).

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

## **Outcomes**

All of the 15 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 data collected into three main categories: 1) **well-being related outcomes** (i.e., satisfaction, well-being, psychological capital, confidence, lower levels of burnout and alleviation of negative emotions, self-awareness, growth, work engagement); (2) **work-related outcomes** (i.e., job satisfaction, job performance, leadership skills or behaviours); and (3) **coaching-related outcomes** (i.e., goal attainment, satisfaction with the process, trusted coaching relationship). It has been demonstrated that coaching results in positive outcomes for both the individual and the organization (see the review by Jones et al., 2016 for more). These outcomes include improved performance, well-being, self-efficacy, satisfaction, self-confidence, and employee engagement, amongst others (Peláez et al., 2020). As a result, it's not unexpected that 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 that focused 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 help to clarify the benefits of PPC interventions on organizational 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).

In spite of 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 taken into account. First, just four of the studies included pre-post follow-up evaluations, and only three of the studies included assessments at two different time points. Future research should make an effort to gather data at different time points in order to test the sustainability of

impact. Second, a total of seven studies adopted a longitudinal methodology. An imperative recommendation is that investigation should broaden beyond cross-sectional relational studies and center on longitudinal studies to confirm evidence for causal interactions. Future research should also confirm the efficacy of PPC programs and their influence on work-related constructs utilizing reliable methodologies such as randomized controlled designs or based on a Realist Evaluation approach, which considers the context factors and working mechanisms influencing the desired outcomes (Nielsen & Miraglia, 2017). Such research would strengthen the argument for corporations to invest in PPC interventions. To further solidify the findings, more qualitative and mixed-methods investigation is necessary. Third, we suggest designing multilevel studies that take into account individual, group, and organizational 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) in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the results and value of the intervention (Milner et al., 2018).

Overall, further empirical investigation is required to establish PPC intervention as a worthwhile workplace strategy.

### **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 in an effort to highlight their value and validity within the corporate environment. Second, it expands understanding of the role of antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and outcomes in the process, as well as recognizing 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 Ritcher et al. (2021) presented a classification of techniques and tools to aid the PPC process. This review summarizes 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 and provide empirical validation of the PPC program in the workplace. Coaches can benefit from this research to improve their performance in the coaching process by taking into account the factors that have been shown to be crucial in delivering a high-quality service to their clients. PPC is a fantastic investment opportunity for corporations since it helps to identify organizational and individual areas for growth and improvement. Finally, the review provides novel avenues for future investigation and some methodological considerations in this emerging field.

### **Limitations**

While several measures were taken to improve the relevance and reliability of this study, its research design and generalizability still have some flaws. First, the review included only 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 based primarily on empirical studies and not grey literature. Therefore, in order to advance 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 was appraised in this review. Finally, it is challenging to speculate about the effectiveness of the PPCs 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 organizational settings.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **General Conclusions**

The central purpose of this thesis was to contribute to the expanding body of knowledge concerning Positive Psychological Coaching (PPC) by offering both theoretical and empirical evidence supporting its impact on personal resources (i.e., psychological capital), and work-related outcomes (i.e., leadership skills, in- and extra-role performance, and well-being) at work. To accomplish this goal and fill in the information gaps in the literature, several research questions were formulated, and two empirical investigations (chapter 2 and 3) and a systematic review (chapter 4) were conducted to address these research challenges. Overall, the findings of the studies that were conducted for the dissertation supported the project's main purpose and corroborated each of the proposed hypothesis.

The two empirical studies (chapters 2 and 3) were conducted with workers from multinational automotive industry companies located in Spain belonging to different organizational levels (non-executives and executives). Moreover, quantitative methods and longitudinal quasi-experimental studies were developed. Data were collected from various sources (such as employees' perceptions and leaders' perceptions), and different statistical procedures (such as repeated-measures ANOVA, paired-sample *t*-test, independent samples *t*-tests, and simple regression) were employed to evaluate the hypotheses and draw conclusions of each study.

The theoretical chapter (chapter 4) aimed to analyse the literature in order to critically review empirical research about the effectiveness of PPC in terms of antecedents, underlying mechanisms and outcomes that lead to the success of the interventions in organizations.

In the following section, the primary aspects of each study, the main findings and contributions to the research challenges (see chapter 1), are discussed in detail. Finally, practical implications, limitation and future research directions are discussed.

## Addressing the research challenges

**CHALLENGE 1:** *Can Positive Psychological Coaching enhance workers' personal resources?*

In order to address the first challenge of this thesis, chapter 2 provided evidence about the value of a PPC intervention for enhancing psychological capital in organizations.

This chapter reported the findings of a longitudinal controlled study that was carried out with a sample of non-executive workers in an automotive industry. It was revealed that the levels of psychological capital increased as a direct result of participation in the Positive Psychological Coaching Program. Additionally, results on long-term effects showed that all outcome variables remained higher four months after finishing the program (follow-up) when considering the whole group (once WL has finished the intervention). Since the significant differences between baseline and follow-up levels of psychological capital were based on self-reported data, a broader range of objective measurements and follow-up sessions should be incorporated to the program in order to evaluate improvement and ensure that participants' motivation and perseverance endure in their goal achievement.

Results also indicate that goal-related self-efficacy plays an important role in the coaching process, helping participants to acquire awareness and improve positive outcomes (i.e., goal attainment) at the end of the intervention. Regardless of the absence of a baseline measurement for goal attainment (it was assessed only during the last coaching session in relation to the goal established in the first session), an increase in goal attainment levels was observed, as stated by participants, and based on the high level of percentage of goal attained. Based on the RE-GROW model, goal-directed and self-efficacy-based intervention characteristics were identified as key antecedents for coaching performance (de Haan et al., 2013).

This chapter makes a contribution to the body of literature on PPC since it is, as far as we know, the first study to evaluate the influence of a non-executive, short-term program based on a strengths-based coaching approach (Burke & Passmore, 2019) and the RE-



GROW model (Grant, 2011a; 2022), on psychological capital using a quasi-experimental control trial design. Finally, this study served as a step forward in the development and evaluation of interventions for enhancing personal resources (i.e., psychological capital) that follow a short-term and strengths-based positive micro-coaching methodology.

**CHALLENGE 2:** *Do Positive Psychological Coaching interventions have a positive impact on work-related constructs such as leadership skills, in- and extra-role performance, and well-being?*

In chapter 3, the influence of a PPC intervention program on leadership skills, in-role and extra-role performance, and well-being was also investigated. The findings demonstrated that participation in the program led to a significant improvement in these outcomes. Otherwise stated, managers who participated in training to develop a positive leadership style improved not only their own (i.e., self-reported and perceived by their employees) levels of positive leadership skills and individual in-role and extra-role performance, but also the eudaimonic well-being and job performance (i.e., in- and extra-role) of their employees (both at individual and team levels). Although long-term effects were not examined (follow-up measurements were not possible due to corporate constraints), an improvement in the outcome levels was observed in the POST evaluation time. This finding stresses the importance of including follow-up evaluation in order to confirm and ensure durability of the intervention's benefits.

This chapter makes various contributions to the strengths-based coaching development literature by examining its effectiveness to improve leadership skills, and work-related outcomes. Since the role of PPC, and specifically strengths-based coaching within the organizational context, has not been extensively researched (Corbu et al., 2020; Dahling et al., 2016; Grant, 2013a; Peláez et al., 2020), findings of this chapter provide empirical support regarding its positive influence on work-related outcomes (i.e., positive leadership skills, well-being, and in-role and extra-role performance).

Finally, findings from this chapter provide light on how leadership training may improve employees' psychological well-being (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020; Walsh & Arnold,

2020) and in- and extra-role performance (Sonmez Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020). Moreover, leaders that participate in PPC leadership interventions tend to raise their own and their team's levels of productivity, as well as strengthen the connection with their team members by building a more positive work environment. Leaders who model positive behaviour make a significant contribution to the overall well-being of their employees (Berger et al., 2019).

**CHALLENGE 3:** *Is Positive Psychological Coaching an effective workplace intervention?*

Chapter 4 provided a comprehensive review of the concept of PPC, along with comparable concepts to the PPC approach (i.e., positive coaching, strengths-based coaching, and strengths coaching), in an attempt to examine its effectiveness in the work field. Fifteen studies focusing on the antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and/or outcomes of the process were analysed, and the results revealed several key factors that lead to the success of the PPC intervention. However, a large number of qualitative studies based on semi-structured interviews still require to be corroborated by rigorous research designs such as quasi-experimental or randomized controlled studies, indicating that explanations about the impact of the intervention on work-related antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and outcomes are uncertain. Despite the expanding number of investigations into PPC and the interesting findings from the exploratory studies, robust designs are needed to test the differences in success factors between control-waiting-list and experimental groups.

First, with regards to the antecedents of PPC, findings from five studies indicated that awareness, identification, and deliberate use of strengths, goal-related self-efficacy, and unconscious biases are factors that influence the coaching process. Second, related to the mechanisms that have been examined as potential explanators for the intervention's success, the conclusions of three studies can be presented as: (1) psychological capital (Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021); (2) a safe space to explore, the focus on positive outcomes and duration of the coaching process (Van der Walt & van Coller-Peter, 2020); and (3) balance of self-focus/other-focus, self-concept, commitment, positive attitude, organisational fit, and relationship with authority figures (Elston & Boniwell, 2011). Only one study followed

a quasi-experimental longitudinal control trial design (Fontes & Dello Russo, 2021), drawing attention to the need for studies with rigorous examinations showing the causal mechanisms by which coaching interventions are effective (Theeboom et al., 2014).

Finally, in order to determine whether it is effective as a workplace intervention and its specific benefits (i.e., outcomes) for the employees and the organization, research results pointed towards (1) well-being related outcomes (i.e., psychological capital, self-efficacy, the value of strengths, hope, self-awareness, greater abilities to resolve work and life challenges, authenticity, growth, alleviation of negative emotions, satisfaction, lower levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion, confidence, motivation); (2) work-related outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, meaningful relationships at work, well-being, work engagement, leadership skills or behaviours, proactivity); and (3) coaching-related outcomes (i.e., goal achievement, satisfaction with the process, trusted coaching relationship).

Overall, this last challenge was answered through chapter 4, which aimed to advance knowledge about the effectiveness of the PPC in organizational settings by putting the spotlight on the drivers of coaching outcomes (i.e., antecedents), underlying mechanisms/mediating factors, and identifying outcomes/consequences/benefits derived from the participation in the PPC programs. This chapter represents an overview of the most recent research on PPC.

### **Practical implications**

This thesis provides implications for applied research and practice of PPC at work. First, PPC is an efficient methodology for promoting and building personal resources and work-related outcomes. PP provides a feasible framework for PPC in organizational settings, as it seeks to strike a balance between positive and negative aspects and to help individuals explore and comprehend the present reality in order to develop strategies for achieving their objectives. Positive interventions have been shown to be effective in the challenge of growing and sustaining workers. Therefore, PPCs are an excellent option for the

implementation of intervention strategies to address the professional and personal growth of individuals throughout times of change and to promote their wellbeing in the workplace.

Second, this dissertation investigates the development of an effective and innovative positive intervention – positive psychological micro-coaching – designed to enhance personal development and optimal functioning for achieving goals. This approach seeks to highlight the potential of short-term coaching sessions (Corbu et al., 2020; Peláez et al., 2020; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020; Theeboom et al., 2014) to aid in goal achievement and enhance psychological well-being and performance over time. This may be an overriding consideration for organizations operating in volatile and fast-changing environments. People work under time limits and must optimize their time use; hence, coaching may not be a high priority based on the paradigm of urgent vs. important. Therefore, due to their emphasis on specific goals, brief coaching sessions are worthwhile as concerns about motivation, flexibility, price, and economy.

Third, this thesis presents an evidence-based intervention with strong methodology based on empirical controlled trials that follows the previously stated positive psychological micro-coaching approach (Corbu et al., 2020; Peláez et al., 2020; Peláez Zuberbühler et al., 2020) for the purpose of fostering employees' personal resources and work outcomes in the workplace. The cultivation of personal resources is one of the most successful strategies for improving psychological wellbeing at work. Implementing positive psychological evidence-based methodologies facilitates personal and professional growth, optimal functioning, well-being, and the awareness of individuals' potential and ability to cope with work-demands (van Zyl et al., 2020). Therefore, PPC programs represent a useful tool for practitioners and HR professionals to help individuals develop their personal resources and work-related variables and, as a result, improve psychological wellbeing (i.e., PsyCap), work-related outcomes (i.e., leadership skills), and organizational performance (in- and extra-role). This technique includes pre-assessment feedback, academic insights, and micro-coaching sessions that focus on specific goals (RE-GROW model). It also involves becoming aware of and practicing personal strengths and coordinating these strengths with leadership skills and

personal and corporate values to help both individual (professional and personal) and organizational growth.

### **Limitations and future research**

The studies provided in this thesis project are not devoid of limitations, which should be taken into account for a more thorough understanding of the results. First, our studies from Chapters 2 and 3 are constrained by the use of self-reported data, making it problematic for the researchers to objectively assess the accuracy of such data. Self-reported performance could raise social desirability (Caputo, 2017). In addition, as participation was voluntary, the engagement and willingness of participants may have affected our results. Nonetheless, findings are reliable with the theory, and we sought to limit the influence of these biases on our studies by collecting data throughout time (i.e., before, after, and follow-up times). To analyse the efficacy of this intervention, it may be useful to include a broader range of objective measurements. In order to obtain a complete and true representation of well-being, it would be useful to evaluate not only the positive elements of well-being, but also the appraisal of negative experiences and emotional states (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016).

Second, because of the shift patterns and work-related schedules of the participants, a strictly randomization into experimental and control-waiting-list groups was not possible. Nevertheless, *t*-test analysis between the groups did not reveal any significant differences in the outcome variables at PRE intervention time.

Third, the sample sizes in both studies (Chapters 2 and 3) were rather modest, limiting the results from being generalized to a broad range of working populations. However, encouraging data regarding the impact of PPC was reported for non-executive and executive levels, with the majority of the effect sizes ranging from moderate to large. However, to strengthen the generalizability of the findings, future research should expand and replicate these studies in more diversified and larger populations and sectors.

Fourth, for one of the studies, follow-up assessments were not feasible, therefore the long-term effects of the intervention were not assessed. Future research should incorporate follow-up coaching sessions to determine that outcome factors are sustained and optimized over time.

To continue contributing to the coaching literature, further research is required to better understand the underlying psychological mechanisms throughout the intervention program that have the potential to influence the outcome variables. Evaluation using diary studies could also show relevant data on this topic. Future studies could also investigate specific elements that contribute to the PPC's effectiveness (e.g., SMART goals, coaches' skills, working alliance, commitment to the process), along with objective indicators of organizational performance.

Finally, the systematic review only included studies published in peer-reviewed journals in the English or Spanish language, which may have resulted in potential bias and a limited body of research. Additionally, the positive psychological coaching concept analyses in this review were based mainly on empirical studies, excluding grey literature, which may have restricted the overall conceptualization and theoretical framework overview. Therefore, in order to further the knowledge and understanding of the PPC literature, future research ought to incorporate other sources of information (i.e., books, editorials, and purely conceptual studies) and languages in their selection criteria.

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## **SUMMARY (English)**

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to expand the understanding of the effectiveness of Positive Psychological Coaching by presenting empirical evidence regarding its antecedents, outcomes, and underlying mechanisms. To accomplish this goal and address the gaps in the existing literature, three research questions have been formulated.

These questions have been operationalized as three different research challenges:

**CHALLENGE 1:** Can Positive Psychological Coaching enhance workers' personal resources?

**CHALLENGE 2:** Do Positive Psychological Coaching interventions have a positive impact on work-related constructs such as leadership skills, in- and extra-role performance, and well-being?

**CHALLENGE 3:** Is Positive Psychological Coaching an effective workplace intervention?

These challenges have been addressed throughout the chapters of this thesis, which include two empirical studies (chapters 2 and 3) and a systematic review (chapter 4). First, Chapter 2 presents an empirical study assessing the effects of a positive psychological coaching program on the psychological capital of employees and the role of goal-related self-efficacy on goal attainment during the coaching process. Next, Chapter 3 explores the efficacy of a strengths-based leadership coaching program for enhancing positive leadership abilities, employees' eudaimonic well-being, and in- and extra-role performance at the individual and team levels. Finally, the Chapter 4 is a systematic review of the antecedents, outcomes, and underlying mechanisms that contribute to the effectiveness of positive psychological coaching in organizational settings. These studies/chapters are framed by a general introduction (chapter 1) and general conclusions (chapter 5).

In general, the findings of the studies performed supported the project's main purpose and corroborated the proposed hypotheses. Moreover, these findings contributed further to the knowledge of positive psychological coaching by providing empirical support of its positive impact on work-related variables such as well-being and performance.



## **RESUMEN (Español)**

El objetivo central de esta tesis doctoral es profundizar en el conocimiento sobre la eficacia del Coaching Psicológico Positivo proporcionando evidencia empírica relativa a los antecedentes, consecuentes y mecanismos subyacentes del proceso. Para alcanzar este objetivo y colmar las lagunas de conocimiento detectadas en la literatura se han formulado tres preguntas de investigación. Dichas preguntas se han operacionalizado en tres desafíos de investigación diferentes:

**DESAFÍO 1:** ¿Puede el Coaching Psicológico Positivo mejorar los recursos personales de los/as trabajadores/as?

**DESAFÍO 2:** ¿Tienen las intervenciones de Coaching Psicológico Positivo un impacto positivo sobre constructos relacionados con el trabajo como las habilidades de liderazgo, el desempeño in- y extra-rol y el bienestar?

**DESAFÍO 3:** ¿Es el Coaching Psicológico Positivo una intervención eficaz en entornos de trabajo?

Estos desafíos han sido abordados a lo largo de los capítulos que componen esta tesis basados en dos estudios empíricos (capítulo 2 y 3) y una revisión sistemática (capítulo 4). En primer lugar, el capítulo 2 presenta un estudio empírico enfocado en examinar los efectos de un programa de coaching psicológico positivo en el capital psicológico de los empleados, y en analizar la influencia de la autoeficacia relacionada con los objetivos en la consecución de la meta durante el proceso de coaching. El capítulo 3 investiga la efectividad de un programa de coaching de liderazgo basado en fortalezas para mejorar las habilidades de liderazgo positivo, el bienestar eudaimónico de los empleados/as y el desempeño in- y extra-rol a nivel individual y de equipo. Por último, el capítulo 4 es una revisión sistemática que analiza los antecedentes, los resultados y los mecanismos subyacentes que conducen a la eficacia del coaching psicológico positivo en el ámbito organizacional. Estos capítulos quedan enmarcados por una introducción general (capítulo 1) y conclusiones generales finales (capítulo 5).

En general, los resultados de los estudios realizados apoyaron el objetivo principal del proyecto y corroboraron las hipótesis propuestas. Además, estos hallazgos contribuyen al avance en el conocimiento sobre el concepto de coaching psicológico positivo presentando evidencia empírica a favor de su impacto positivo en variables relacionadas con el bienestar y desempeño de los/as trabajadores/as.

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**Should**

**Would**

**Could**

**Did**

