

Cognitive hardiness in coaching: Personality trait, skill, or outcome?

Kenneth Nowack & Apolonia Niemiowski

Introduction: Client factors contribute the largest variance to predicting successful coaching (McKenna & Davis, 2009). One important client factor related to appraising work and life change and adversity as a challenge, possessing a sense of self-efficacy, and having an internal sense of locus of control is cognitive hardiness. The aim of this study is to help coaches clarify whether cognitive hardiness acts as a relatively stable personal resource influencing the outcomes of coaching (personality trait), something that can be improved by coaching (skill) or is a useful outcome measure.

Design: A total of 256 employees working in a tax audit company were asked to complete a set of validated measures to explore the association with specific individual factors (hardiness, happiness, proactive coping) with multiple work (job satisfaction, work self-efficacy, work conflict, and counterproductive behaviour) and health outcomes (physical symptoms, job burnout, and depression).

Results: Regression analyses were used to identify the individual factors that contributed to predicting work and health outcomes. Cognitive hardiness significantly added to predictions of burnout, depression, happiness, work locus of control, job satisfaction, work conflict, and proactive coping but not work-related self-efficacy, physical symptoms, or counterproductive behaviour ($p < .001$). Results of the stepwise multiple linear regression indicated that five variables significantly contributed to the prediction of cognitive hardiness (happiness, locus of control, depression, proactive coping, and burnout) accounting for R^2 of .56 ($F(9, 256) = 60.82, p < .00$).

Conclusion: Extending prior research demonstrating significant change in cognitive hardiness following individually based coaching and training programmes using the same assessment, the results of this study lend support that this construct can act as personality trait, but also can be used as a useful outcome measure in coaching effectiveness, as well as a skill that can be enhanced as a result of specific psychoeducational techniques and strategies. Implications for coaching psychology, based on different conceptualisations of cognitive hardiness are discussed.

Keywords: coaching psychology; hardiness; resilience; wellbeing; stress.

Introduction

PRIOR research (McKenna & Davis, 2009) identified four 'active ingredients' that account for the majority of variance within coaching psychology and therapy outcomes including hope/expectancy (15 per cent), theory/technique (15 per cent), relationship alliance (30 per cent), and client factors (40 per cent). Additionally, two large-scale, randomised controlled executive coaching studies (de Haan et al., 2020) suggest that the working alliance

factor between coach and client may be even less important to coaching outcomes as was suggested in earlier research.

A comprehensive meta-analysis suggests that coaching success depends largely on specific client factors (e.g. hope, self-efficacy, self-esteem, core self-evaluation), a generally positive feeling about the coaching techniques used, and an overall satisfaction with the coaching relationship (Grover & Furnham, 2016; Tee et al., 2017). However,