

## Self-esteem within cognitive behavioural coaching: a theoretical framework to integrate theory with practice

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### Aim of study

Cognitive behavioural coaching is an integrative approach that has developed since the early 1990s. It combines the use of cognitive, behavioural and problem-solving techniques to enable coaches to improve performance, resilience and enhance coachees' well being. This study highlights the use of cognitive behavioural coaching in overcoming low self-esteem. Low self-esteem has been shown to impact on action planning and motivation – the authors provide practitioners with an array of strategies and tools they can use to work with clients' self-esteem issues.

### Background

#### What is self-esteem?

Rosenberg defines self-esteem as the way individuals feel towards themselves. Research suggests that a negative self-view on a specific domain of our life (e.g. academic abilities) impacts our general feelings of self-worth – this is often referred to as low self-esteem. Individuals with low self-esteem engage in negative self-evaluations and are highly dependent on external feedback.

#### How do individuals make self-evaluations about the different domains of their life?

Research suggests that individuals engage in self-evaluations not just by asking, “How good or bad am I?” but also:

- How good or bad am I in comparison to other people – social comparisons
- How good or bad am I in comparison to how I was in the past and how I will be in the future – temporal comparisons, especially popular in people who are undergoing major personal changes
- How good or bad do other people think I am – reflective appraisals that develop from social experiences
- How big is the discrepancy between my actual and my ideal self – self discrepancy provides us with a more accurate evaluation of our self-esteem

#### How can Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC) improve coachees' self-esteem?

1. In CBC techniques are used to help coachees recognize negative thoughts (e.g. I'm a failure) and irrational beliefs (e.g. If I don't perform well I will lose my job)
2. Coaches help clients identify the critical aspects of the activating events that trigger negative self-beliefs that are also accompanied by negative emotions like anxiety
3. CBC enables belief modification, especially when dealing with coachees who are reluctant to change and show perfectionist tendencies

## Tools and Strategies

Authors suggest that the following 4 strategies will reduce coachees' negative thinking and facilitate psychological robustness and resilience:

Strategy	Modification of Thinking Errors	Downward Arrow	Cost-benefit analysis of a belief	Defining beliefs on specific domains of the self
Aim	Help coachees move towards rational, realistic self-acceptance	Help coachees uncover negative core self-beliefs	Help coachees in evaluating solutions to problems and weighing up decisions	Help coachees challenge global core beliefs about themselves
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elicit automatic negative thoughts</li> <li>- Challenge their associated irrational beliefs</li> <li>- Correct the way coachees gather information about self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use situational critical thoughts (e.g. lack of ability to provide feedback as a manager) as the entry point in identifying deep-seated self-critical beliefs (e.g. I am a failure as a manager)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Used during belief modification</li> <li>- Coachees are encouraged to consider the advantages and disadvantages of holding onto to a negative belief through visualisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enables coachees to de-construct and break down in different components absolute self-judgments (e.g. I am a failure as a manager)</li> </ul>
Method/ Examples	<p>The coach uses questions to dispute self-critical beliefs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Empirical</u>: <i>Where is the evidence that other people think negative of you?</i></li> <li>2. <u>Logical</u>: <i>Is it logical to assume that failing a task means that you are a failure?</i></li> <li>3. <u>Third person perspective</u>: <i>What would you say to a friend who had failed a similar task?</i></li> </ol>	<p>The coach asks repeatedly about what a situational negative thought means to the client:</p> <p><u>Coachee</u>: <i>I will mess up the feedback process</i></p> <p><u>Coach</u>: <i>If you mess it up what does it mean to you?</i></p> <p><u>Coachee</u>: <i>That I am not a good manager</i></p> <p><u>Coach</u>: <i>And if that's the case, what does it mean to you</i></p> <p><u>Coachee</u>: <i>That I am a complete failure</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The coach or coachee draws a 4x4 table with an old belief (e.g. I am not a good manager) and a new or revised belief (e.g. I am a good enough manager)</li> <li>2. A written analysis is then conducted of the advantages and disadvantages of either holding onto the old belief, or taking a new more flexible view</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The coach uses a pie chart to help coachee identify specific components of a core belief</li> <li>2. These components are chosen based on the principle that they make up that belief – they are also weighted: <u>Example</u>: I am not a good manager</li> </ol> <p><u>Components</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Giving feedback</li> <li>- Empowering employees</li> <li>- Providing support</li> <li>- Understanding work balance</li> </ul>
End result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Weaken old beliefs</li> <li>- Strengthen helpful alternatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coachees explore their work-related negative self-beliefs that contribute to their low self-esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coachees are able to see more clearly the impact of a negative self-belief on various aspects of their life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coachees are able to see that they may be placing too much emphasis on negative domains (e.g. giving feedback) and ignoring those where they are functioning well (e.g. empowering employees)</li> <li>- Coachees can also draw plans of actions with their coach for self-development</li> </ul>

## Limitations / Questions

- The study provides a theoretical framework bringing together research on self-esteem and cognitive behavioural coaching. Further empirical research is needed to establish the extent to which the strategies discussed can have a significant impact on coachees' self-esteem in different coaching engagements.