

Understanding potential career changers' experience of career confidence following a positive psychology based coaching programme (Sarah Artcher & Julia Yates)

COACHING: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE, 2017
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2017.1292535>

Aim of study

In the current global job market where more and more people are contemplating changing careers Artcher and Yates explore the role of career confidence in making a successful career transition. They employ a four-stage approach to coaching and argue that positive psychology based interventions have a significant impact on coachees' levels of resilience, hope, optimism and self-efficacy.

Background

What is career confidence?

According to Stajkovic 2006 career confidence has two dimensions; firstly as a malleable state- like belief of individuals ability to function in a specific domain (e.g. career), and secondly as a more stable trait-like belief that may generalize to various domains of peoples' lives. This definition emphasizes the importance of focusing both on how career changers might feel about undertaking specific actions, as well as their general beliefs about their ability to change their careers.

Stajkovic also suggests that career confidence is composed of 4 constructs:

1. Self-efficacy beliefs that help determine how much effort people will expend on an activity and how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles (Bandura, 1997)
2. Hope a positive motivation state that encompasses goal directed determination and planning of pathways for meeting these goals (Snyder et al., 1991)
3. Optimism, an expectation of a positive future outcome and the belief in being able to influence that outcome (Biswas – Diener, 2010)
4. Resilience, a capacity to withstand and even thrive when faced with extended periods of pressure (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013)

What do we know about career change?

- Career change involves the movement to a new occupation or profession that is not part of typical career progression (Ornstein & Isabella, 1993)
- Career change encompasses a range of processes and skills including career exploration, career choice, decision making, job search, self-motivation, goal setting, coping with rejection and self-regulation of emotions (Artcher & Yates, 2017)
- Ibarra, 2005 argues that during voluntary career change individuals disengage from a central career identity while exploring new possible selves and then once the transition is complete integrate an alternative identity
- Barclay's et al., 2011 (cited in Artcher & Yates, 2017 p.4) use the following **Transtheoretical Model** to describe the stages of the career change processes

Stage 1: Pre-contemplation	Experiencing discouragement Loss of interest in work Letting go of old work identity
Stage 2: Contemplation	Growing awareness of job dissatisfaction Concern for the future Initial thoughts and expressions of doubt regarding a possible career change Weighting pros/cons Emotional expressions
Stage 3: Preparation	Increasing personal control/self-efficacy Increased motivation to change careers Willingness to explore interest/skills
Stage 4: Action	Managing stress Redefining self Consolidating, advancing
Stage 5: Maintenance	Building co-worker relationships End of educational pursuits Holding on, innovating

Key findings

- Coaching acted as catalyst for change in career confidence. Addressing all 4 constructs (hope, optimism, resilience and self-efficacy) via coaching had the greatest impact on participant confidence
- Participants **key negative emotions** including unhappiness, fear of failure, self-doubt and anxiety were **reduced**
- Coaching was shown to have a **positive effect** on participant **career engagement and self-awareness**
- Participants reported experiencing increased **positivity** and a newly developed ability to **dispute negative thoughts**
- Coaching enabled participants to focus on goal setting and active planning
- Study results offer further support for the importance of clear goal setting for career changers
- Findings support a **partnership between positive psychology and career coaching** – being in a positive frame of mind with higher levels of career confidence is shown to propel individuals in acting and moving forward

Research design – methodology

- A qualitative design was used for this study, and researchers employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the research method. IPA was considered appropriate for allowing an in-depth understanding of individual coachees experiences of the coaching programme
- Five individuals participated in a four-session coaching programme using positive psychology interventions:

1 st Session: Strengths	Focus on building self-efficacy and identifying/using core strengths
2 nd Session: Hope	Visualisation of best possible future self
3 rd Session: Optimism	Managing negative thoughts – positive affirmations – CBT techniques
4 th Session: Resilience	Raising awareness of existing resources for building resilience

Limitations

- It should be noted that all study participants were women - it would be interesting to repeat the same study with participants from both genders
- This was a small scale study and it would be useful to see whether these results could be replicated in a larger scale study