



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



CAN LIFE COACHING IMPACT AND ENHANCE EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES AND PRODUCTIVITY? A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW AND INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Organizations increasingly recognize that sustainable productivity depends not only on employees' technical competence but also on their psychological resources, clarity of purpose, self-efficacy, resilience, and engagement. This article examines whether and how life coaching can enhance employee outcomes and productivity. Its objective is to synthesize evidence from workplace coaching, coaching psychology, positive psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource development, and to propose an integrative model linking coaching to organizational value. Methodologically, the study adopts a structured conceptual review: peer-reviewed meta-analyses, a randomized controlled study, and foundational theoretical works were identified, appraised, and organized against an a priori mechanism chain running from coaching through psychological and behavioral change to employee and organizational outcomes. Results indicate that workplace coaching produces positive effects across skill-based, affective, and individual-level outcomes, with meta-analytic effect sizes ranging from small-to-moderate for skills to large for individual-level results, and that controlled evidence links coaching to goal attainment, resilience, and workplace well-being. Effects vary with coaching quality, employee readiness, organizational context, measurement method, and alignment between coaching and business priorities. The analysis shows that coaching influences productivity indirectly, by developing the psychological and behavioral conditions that enable productive performance, rather than by directly manufacturing output. It concludes that life coaching is not a stand-alone remedy for organizational dysfunction; it creates the greatest value when professionally delivered, ethically governed, evidence-informed, and integrated with leadership development, performance management, learning and development, and well-being strategies. A five-stage life coaching-productivity framework is proposed to guide practice and future research.

Keywords: Life coaching; Workplace coaching; Employee productivity; Employee engagement; Self-efficacy; Human resource development.

1 INTRODUCTION

The contemporary workplace is characterized by rapid technological transformation, economic uncertainty, changing employee expectations, hybrid working arrangements, intensified performance demands, and continuous organizational change. Organizations increasingly require employees who can learn continuously, adapt to uncertainty, solve problems, manage relationships, maintain psychological resilience, and take responsibility for their own development. Within this context, sustainable productivity is understood to depend not only on technical competence but also on employees' psychological resources, clarity of purpose, self-efficacy, and capacity to manage personal and professional challenges.

Traditional employee development has often focused on training employees in predetermined knowledge and skills. Coaching represents a different developmental philosophy. Instead of primarily telling employees what they need to know, coaching encourages them to examine assumptions, identify goals, explore alternatives, develop solutions, and translate intentions into action. Within this developmental space, life coaching has emerged as an intervention that may contribute to improved employee outcomes by helping individuals clarify goals, strengthen self-awareness, develop constructive behaviors, overcome limiting patterns, and assume greater responsibility for performance.

Research increasingly suggests that workplace coaching can generate positive organizational outcomes. Jones, Woods, and Guillaume (2016) found positive effects across skill-based, affective, and individual-level outcomes, while Cannon-Bowers et al. (2023) likewise concluded that workplace coaching generally produces a significant positive effect across workplace outcomes, emphasizing the need for stronger controlled research. Earlier, Grant, Curtayne, and Burton (2009) provided the first randomized controlled evidence that professional external coaching can enhance goal attainment, resilience, and workplace well-being.

1.1 Objectives of the study

This article addresses a central question: Can life coaching meaningfully improve employee outcomes and, ultimately, organizational productivity? It pursues three objectives: (i) to synthesize theoretical and empirical evidence on coaching effectiveness in organizational settings; (ii) to articulate the mechanisms through which coaching may influence employee and organizational outcomes; and (iii) to propose an integrative framework and a research agenda.

The article argues that coaching contributes through a chain of mechanisms—coaching leading to self-awareness, goal clarity, and self-efficacy, then to behavioral change, improved employee outcomes, and ultimately enhanced productivity (Figure 1)—and that its contribution is primarily indirect and developmental rather than automatic.

2 UNDERSTANDING LIFE COACHING IN THE WORKPLACE

Life coaching can broadly be understood as a collaborative, goal-oriented developmental process through which individuals are supported in identifying aspirations, understanding barriers, developing alternatives, taking action, and evaluating progress. Although life coaching and workplace coaching overlap, they should not automatically be treated as identical. Workplace or executive coaching normally focuses directly on organizational objectives such as leadership capability, performance, communication, career development, or behavioral change. Life coaching tends to adopt a broader perspective that may include purpose, personal goals, confidence, work–life integration, habits, identity, decision-making, and personal effectiveness.

The distinction becomes blurred because employees do not leave their personal identities, beliefs, emotions, motivations, and challenges outside the workplace. Development of the person can therefore influence development of the performer. This premise underpins the present review: while the strongest evidence base concerns workplace, executive, and psychologically informed coaching, its mechanisms plausibly extend to life-coaching approaches when these are professionally delivered and adapted to organizational contexts.

3 MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a structured conceptual review and synthesis design. Rather than reporting new primary data, it consolidates theoretical and empirical evidence to build an integrative framework. The approach is appropriate where the aim is to organize a multidisciplinary literature—spanning coaching psychology, positive psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource development—into a coherent, testable model. The review proceeded in four steps: identification of relevant sources; appraisal of their evidential strength; thematic organization against an a priori mechanism chain; and synthesis into a staged framework and research agenda.

3.2 Sources and selection

Sources were drawn from peer-reviewed journals and authoritative scholarly works addressing coaching effectiveness and its psychological foundations. Priority was given to the strongest available designs: meta-analyses of workplace coaching (Cannon-Bowers et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2016) and a randomized controlled study of executive coaching (Grant et al., 2009), complemented by foundational theoretical sources on goal-setting (Locke & Latham, 2002), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and psychological capital (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Professional-body evidence on the scale of the coaching industry was consulted for context (International Coaching Federation, 2020). Sources were included when they addressed the relationship between coaching and workplace-relevant outcomes and excluded when they lacked methodological transparency or addressed coaching only in non-organizational settings.

3.3 Analytical framework

Evidence was organized against a mechanism chain specifying that coaching acts on outcomes indirectly, through psychological mechanisms (self-awareness, self-efficacy, autonomy, motivation, resilience, and goal clarity) and behavioral change (decision-making, communication, prioritization, and interpersonal effectiveness), which in turn shape employee outcomes and, ultimately, organizational productivity. Each source was mapped to one or more links in this chain, and recurring relationships were consolidated into the five-stage framework presented in Section 11. Because the study synthesizes published secondary evidence and contains no human-subject data, ethical approval was not required; the analysis is interpretive and its limitations are discussed in Section 13.

3.4 Theoretical Foundations of Coaching Effectiveness

3.4.1 Goal-setting theory

Goal-setting theory proposes that specific and challenging goals can improve performance when individuals are committed to those goals and receive appropriate feedback (Locke & Latham, 2002). Coaching supports this process by helping employees transform vague aspirations into clearer goals, identify milestones, anticipate obstacles, and review progress. In this way, coaching helps bridge the gap between aspiration and action.

3.4.2 Self-efficacy and employee performance

Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to execute the actions necessary to achieve desired outcomes. Coaching may strengthen self-efficacy by helping employees recognize previous successes, challenge limiting assumptions, develop achievable action plans, experiment with new behaviors, and reflect on progress. This creates a potential mechanism whereby coaching increases self-efficacy, which fosters greater initiative and persistence and, in turn, improved performance.

3.4.3 Self-determination and intrinsic motivation

Self-determination theory identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs influencing motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Coaching can support autonomy by asking employees to generate options, evaluate alternatives, and commit to actions rather than merely comply with instructions. Compliance and commitment are not the same phenomenon, and coaching is oriented toward the latter.

3.4.4 Positive psychology and psychological capital

Life coaching is closely connected with positive psychology, particularly its emphasis on strengths, meaning, optimism, resilience, and human flourishing. Psychological capital is commonly represented through hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—the HERO framework (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Coaching may support these resources by helping employees establish pathways toward goals, develop confidence, reinterpret setbacks, identify strengths, and maintain constructive future expectations.

4 HOW LIFE COACHING CAN INFLUENCE EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES

Building on these foundations, coaching can plausibly influence a range of employee outcomes. The following mechanisms are frequently identified in the literature and are summarized here.

4.1 Goal clarity

Coaching helps employees assess where they are, where they want to be, and what they must do to close the gap. Greater clarity can improve prioritization and the allocation of attention.

4.2 Employee engagement

Coaching can enhance engagement when employees perceive greater meaning in their roles, recognize opportunities for growth, experience support, and understand how personal objectives connect with organizational objectives.

4.3 Employee well-being

Life coaching can help individuals examine sources of stress, personal priorities, boundaries, habits, coping strategies, and competing responsibilities. Coaching is not psychotherapy and should not be presented as treatment for mental-health disorders. Nevertheless, it can contribute to preventive well-being by strengthening reflection, agency, coping strategies, and constructive behavior—an interpretation consistent with controlled evidence that coaching can reduce stress and enhance workplace well-being (Grant et al., 2009).

4.4 Resilience

Coaching can strengthen resilience by helping individuals reinterpret setbacks as learning experiences, identify available resources, develop alternative strategies, and regain a sense of control.

4.5 Learning and development

Training commonly transfers knowledge, whereas coaching facilitates learning through reflection, application, accountability, and behavioral experimentation. The two approaches should complement rather than replace one another.

4.6 Interpersonal relationships

Coaching creates a reflective environment in which employees can examine interpersonal situations from alternative perspectives and experiment with more effective communication, conflict management, and collaboration.

4.7 Accountability

Effective coaching converts insight into commitment through action plans, milestones, follow-up discussions, and reflection on results. The cycle can be expressed as awareness, choice, action, accountability, reflection, and improvement.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 The mechanism chain from coaching to productivity

Synthesizing the evidence yields a consistent picture: coaching does not manufacture productivity directly but sets in motion a chain of psychological and behavioral changes that enable productive performance. Figure 1 depicts this chain, running from the coaching intervention through self-awareness, goal clarity, and self-efficacy to behavioral change, improved employee outcomes, and enhanced productivity. Each link is supported by the theoretical foundations reviewed above and, at several points, by empirical evidence discussed below.

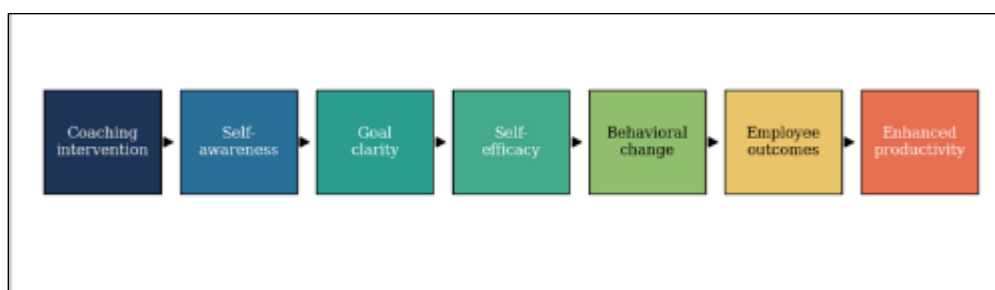


Figure 1: The proposed mechanism chain linking coaching to enhanced productivity through psychological and behavioral change.

5.2 Meta-analytic and controlled evidence

Meta-analytic evidence supports the proposition that workplace coaching improves performance-related and developmental outcomes. Jones et al. (2016) synthesized seventeen studies and reported positive effects on organizational outcomes overall, together with distinct effects for skill-based, affective, and individual-level criteria; the individual-level effect was notably large, while skill-based effects were smaller (Figure 2). Cannon-Bowers et al. (2023)

similarly concluded that workplace coaching generally produces a significant positive effect across outcomes, while calling for stronger controlled designs. At the level of the individual study, Grant et al. (2009) provided the first randomized controlled trial using professional external coaches, finding that a short cognitive-behavioral, solution-focused program enhanced goal attainment, resilience, and workplace well-being and reduced depression and stress. Together, these sources triangulate the claim that coaching can produce meaningful, if context-dependent, benefits.

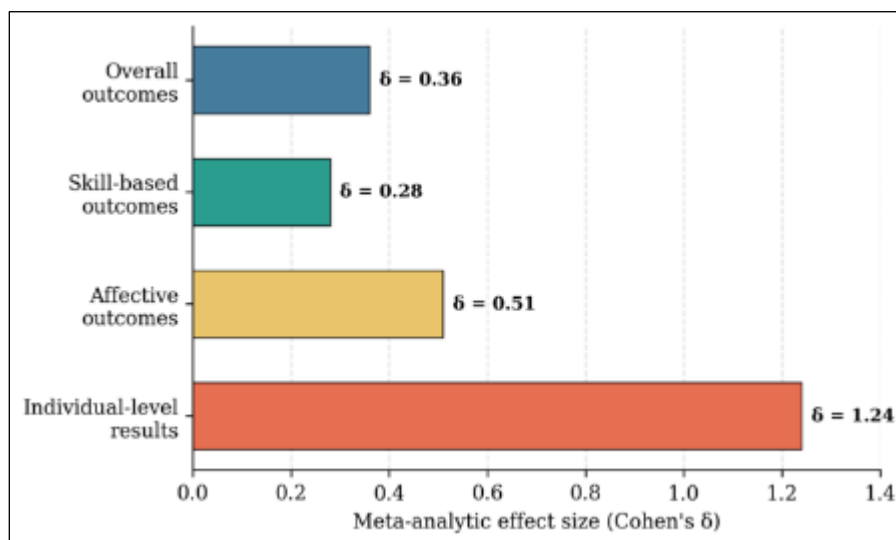


Figure 2: Meta-analytic effect sizes for workplace coaching reported by Jones et al. (2016), expressed as Cohen's δ for overall, skill-based, affective, and individual-level outcomes.

Two moderators reported by Jones et al. (2016) are practically important. Effects were stronger for internal than external coaches, and the use of multisource (360-degree) feedback was associated with smaller positive effects, whereas coaching format and duration did not significantly moderate outcomes. These findings caution against assuming that more elaborate or longer coaching is necessarily more effective, and they underscore that how coaching is delivered matters as much as whether it is offered.

5.3 Coaching and productivity: outcomes mapped

Table 1 maps specific coaching influences to employee outcomes and their potential organizational effects. Productivity here is understood not as employees working harder or longer but as valuable outputs relative to resources consumed. Coaching may influence this ratio through goal clarification, self-awareness, self-efficacy, accountability, stress management, resilience, communication, career clarity, leadership capability, and strengths utilization. Organizations should nevertheless avoid exaggerated claims that coaching automatically yields a specific percentage increase in productivity, because organizational performance is shaped by many interacting variables.

Table 1: Mapping coaching influences to employee outcomes and potential organizational effects.

Coaching influence	Employee outcome	Potential organizational effect
Goal clarification	Better prioritization	Increased productivity
Self-awareness	Improved behavioral choices	Better performance
Self-efficacy	Greater confidence	Increased initiative
Accountability	Improved execution	Higher goal achievement
Stress management	Greater psychological stability	Reduced productivity loss
Resilience	Faster recovery from setbacks	Greater continuity
Communication coaching	Better relationships	Improved teamwork
Career coaching	Greater developmental clarity	Stronger retention
Leadership coaching	Better people management	Improved team performance
Strengths identification	Better role utilization	Higher contribution

5.4 Coaching versus traditional performance management

Traditional performance management frequently concentrates on evaluating previous results, whereas coaching is predominantly future-oriented. Performance measurement asks what results were achieved; coaching asks how better results can be achieved next time. Combining both can create a more developmental performance-management architecture that both accounts for past outcomes and builds future capability.

5.5 The role of managers as coaches

Organizations increasingly encourage managers to adopt coaching behaviors. A manager acting as a coach shifts from telling to asking, from controlling to empowering, from judging to exploring, from solving to facilitating, and from directing to developing. Managerial coaching also presents challenges, because employees may hesitate to disclose concerns to the same manager responsible for evaluating performance, salary, promotion, or employment prospects. Organizations should therefore distinguish among managerial coaching, internal professional coaching, and external coaching—a distinction reinforced by the finding that coach type moderates effectiveness (Jones et al., 2016).

5.6 Conditions required for effective coaching

The evidence indicates that coaching outcomes are conditional. Six conditions are especially important:

- Employee readiness. Employees must demonstrate willingness to reflect, learn, and experiment with new behaviors.
- Psychological safety. Employees must feel sufficiently safe to discuss challenges without inappropriate consequences.
- Coach competence. Effective coaching requires listening, questioning, goal-setting, feedback, ethical judgment, and appropriate boundaries.
- Confidentiality. Employees need clarity regarding what remains confidential and what information, if any, may be communicated to the organization.
- Goal alignment. Organizationally sponsored coaching should balance employee goals, role requirements, and organizational objectives.
- Senior leadership support. Coaching cultures are unlikely to develop where leaders promote empowerment publicly but punish mistakes or questioning in practice.

5.7 Coaching is not a remedy for organizational dysfunction

One of the greatest risks associated with corporate coaching is using it to individualize organizational problems. An employee experiencing burnout because of unrealistic workload, chronic understaffing, poor leadership, unclear responsibilities, dysfunctional systems, or organizational injustice cannot be sustainably helped by coaching alone. Coaching must never become a substitute for responsible management. Sustainable performance is better understood as the interaction of individual development, managerial effectiveness, healthy systems, and supportive culture.

5.8 Measuring the return on coaching

Organizations investing in coaching should evaluate outcomes across several levels: employee experience; psychological outcomes such as self-efficacy, resilience, goal clarity, and engagement; behavioral change; performance outcomes such as goal achievement, productivity, quality, and retention; and longer-term organizational impact such as leadership-pipeline strength, agility, and sustainable performance. Organizations should avoid attributing every performance improvement exclusively to coaching, because organizational performance is influenced by multiple interacting variables. Rigorous evaluation, ideally using controlled or longitudinal designs, is necessary to isolate coaching effects.

6 A PROPOSED LIFE COACHING–PRODUCTIVITY FRAMEWORK

The preceding synthesis can be consolidated into a five-stage framework (Figure 3). The framework makes explicit that coaching operates through sequential stages rather than acting directly on output.

- **Stage 1 — Coaching intervention:** structured reflection, questioning, goal clarification, feedback, action planning, and accountability.
- **Stage 2 — Psychological mechanisms:** self-awareness, self-efficacy, autonomy, motivation, resilience, goal clarity, and psychological resources.
- **Stage 3 — Behavioral change:** decision-making, communication, prioritization, accountability, problem-solving, adaptability, and interpersonal effectiveness.

- **Stage 4 — Employee outcomes:** engagement, performance, well-being, learning, retention, leadership effectiveness, and goal attainment.
- **Stage 5 — Organizational outcomes:** productivity, quality, innovation, customer satisfaction, organizational agility, talent retention, and sustainable performance.



Figure 3: The proposed five-stage life coaching–productivity framework.

The framework emphasizes that coaching does not directly manufacture productivity; it develops the psychological and behavioral conditions that can enable productive performance. This staged logic also clarifies why effects are contingent: a breakdown at any stage—for example, insight that never translates into behavioral change, or behavioral change unsupported by organizational systems—attenuates the ultimate impact on productivity.

7 IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Coaching should be integrated into the employee-development architecture rather than treated as an isolated intervention available only to senior executives. Organizations should develop coaching capability among managers while maintaining access to qualified professional coaches where independence and confidentiality are necessary. Coaching objectives should be connected with competency frameworks, performance management, leadership development, succession planning, employee engagement, and career development. Human resource functions should also establish ethical standards governing confidentiality, informed consent, boundaries, record keeping, and referral procedures.

The ultimate ambition should not simply be to have coaches, but to build a coaching culture characterized by curiosity, reflection, constructive feedback, learning from mistakes, accountability, continuous development, and employee ownership. Given the scale of professional coaching globally (International Coaching Federation, 2020), the challenge for organizations is less one of availability than of disciplined, evidence-informed integration.

8 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations qualify this review. First, the strongest research base concerns workplace, executive, and psychologically informed coaching rather than every form of commercial life coaching; generalization from the former to the latter should be cautious. Second, the study is a conceptual synthesis of secondary evidence and does not itself test causal relationships. Third, the coaching evidence base, though growing, still contains relatively few large randomized controlled trials, and outcome measurement is heterogeneous.

These limitations define a research agenda. Future empirical studies should examine life coaching specifically within organizational environments rather than assuming that findings from executive coaching automatically generalize to all employees. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable for determining whether improvements persist after coaching concludes. Research should also examine differences according to employee level, occupational category,

organizational culture, coach qualifications, virtual versus face-to-face delivery, coaching duration, and voluntary versus organization-mandated participation. Above all, future studies should connect psychological outcomes with objective organizational indicators such as productivity, quality, retention, innovation, and customer outcomes, and should ask for whom coaching works, under what conditions, through which methods, for which outcomes, and whether gains are sustained.

9 CONCLUSION

Can life coaching impact and enhance employee outcomes and productivity? The available evidence suggests that it can, but its contribution is primarily indirect and developmental. Life coaching does not increase productivity simply because an employee attends coaching sessions. Its value emerges when coaching strengthens self-awareness, confidence, motivation, goal clarity, resilience, accountability, and behavioral effectiveness—and when these improvements are transferred into workplace behavior and supported by healthy organizational systems.

Human productivity cannot be sustainably maximized solely through technology, processes, targets, and performance indicators. Productivity ultimately depends upon people, and people perform most effectively when they possess the capability, confidence, clarity, psychological resources, and organizational environment necessary to contribute. Life coaching, when professionally delivered, ethically governed, evidence-informed, and aligned with organizational objectives, can therefore become a valuable component of modern human resource development. Its significance lies not in replacing sound management but in complementing it—developing the human foundations on which sustainable productivity depends.

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