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<th>Title</th>
<th>Coaching as a vehicle for greater creativity and innovation?</th>
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<td>Investing in the Future of the Individual</td>
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<td>Authors</td>
<td>Céline Rojon (University of Edinburgh Business School), Almuth McDowall (University of Surrey)</td>
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Summary
Innovation and creativity are at the heart of business success. Yet, the evidence base for techniques to facilitate both is rather sparse. This paper presents a pilot study with business and psychology students examining the efficacy of a group-based coaching intervention drawing on Gestalt coaching principles. Utilising a controlled quasi-experimental design (including the use of a control group), we test the effects of our intervention on domain-specific self-efficacy, creativity and innovation.
Coaching as a vehicle for greater creativity and innovation?

Overview and background
Creativity and innovation are crucial to organisational success and hence intrinsic to the UK government’s strategy (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), 2011). A variety of different techniques and workshops exist to facilitate both creativity, defined here as the generation of ideas (Axtell, Holman, Unsworth, Wall, Waterson & Harrington, 2000), as well as innovation, understood as implementation of ideas (ibid.). However, many well-known techniques have a questionable evidence base, an example being ‘brainstorming’, a popular approach to stimulating creativity and innovation, research indicating that group dynamics can stifle individual ideas (e.g. King & Anderson, 1995). Hence, there is a rationale for working with individuals on a one-to-one basis, or in combination with one-to-one/group approaches, to support individuals’ idea generation as part of a coaching paradigm, using appropriate facilitation techniques. Yet curiously, there is little research on creativity, innovation and coaching per se. This is somewhat surprising, given a) the importance of the generation and implementation of ideas to the knowledge economy that we work in, as well as b) the omnipresence and growth of coaching in the workplace and elsewhere (e.g. Passmore, 2012). Thus, in our present study, using a quasi-experimental design, we examine the effects of a newly developed coaching intervention received by an intervention group and comparing participants’ levels of creativity and innovation pre and post intervention to those of a control group, which is not exposed to the intervention. We expect the coaching to have a positive impact on participants’ generation (i.e. creativity) and implementation of ideas (i.e. innovation), as well as their creative self-efficacy. The study is currently underway; findings will be made available at the time of the conference.

Current study

Research question
To what extent does coaching facilitate creativity and innovation compared to a control group that does not receive the intervention?

More specifically, we expect the following:

a) Participants in the intervention group (i.e. who receive the coaching intervention) will generate more ideas and score higher on measures assessing creativity, innovation and domain-specific self-efficacy than those in the control group (i.e. who is not exposed to the coaching intervention).

b) There will be a significant difference in means for both the creativity/innovation/self-efficacy measures and idea generation between the baseline assessment and follow up assessments.
**Method**

**Participants**
Participants recruited for this study are full-time or part-time MSc or MBA students from two UK universities. The inclusion criterion is that students have some level of professional work experience (at least six months) to facilitate understanding of a case study presented to participants during the quasi experiment (see below for further information regarding this case study). Following calculations to determine statistical power, 27 participants are being recruited per group (i.e. intervention/control) (i.e. \( N_{\text{total}} = 54 \)).

**Design**
We are implementing a quasi-experimental, 2x2 mixed factorial design as follows (see also Table 1):
- Independent variable 1: Intervention/experimental group and control group (between-groups comparison)
- Independent variable 2: Pre-test/baseline measures of creativity (just before undertaking coaching intervention; subjective measures only) and post-test/follow up assessments (different time lags afterwards: immediately afterwards (objective and subjective measures) and 2 weeks/4 weeks afterwards (subjective measures only)) (within-groups comparison)
- Dependent variable: creativity/innovation scores (objective idea generation index; results from subjective measures)

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<td><strong>Table 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Between-groups comparison</strong></th>
<th><strong>Within-groups comparison</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention group pre-test/baseline</td>
<td>Control group pre-test/baseline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention group post-test/follow up</td>
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As explained, the design is mixed, measuring changes within each group across baseline and follow up, as well as measuring differences between the intervention/experimental and control groups. In order to avoid evaluation apprehension (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987), ideas generated are not evaluated by the study facilitator, the instructions stressing that ‘anything goes’.

**Procedure**
Having gathered the respective programme directors’ consent to do thus, participants across the two UK universities involved in this research are recruited through email lists, a prize draw being
offered to attract individuals. Participants are assigned to conditions using a random number generator. The overall approach to this research is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Study procedure.**

The (subjective) measures, which are validated questionnaires on creativity, innovation (Axtell, Holman, Unsworth, Wall, Waterson & Harrington, 2000) and creative self-efficacy (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007), require that participants rate themselves on a variety of aspects (subjective measures). Moreover, an objective index of creativity will be used, namely the actual generation of ideas.

**Intervention/experimental group**

The basic procedure is the same as in the control group, which is outlined below, except, of course, that the experimental group is being exposed to a specific coaching intervention that we have developed. As such, we are using a group-based coaching approach for the experimental condition, drawing on the principles of Gestalt coaching. Derived from techniques long established in clinical and counselling contexts, Gestalt psychology purports an experiential approach, where clients are encouraged, through questioning and facilitation, to work on the ‘here and now’, with a clear focus on the present (Whybrow & Allan, 2007). We have combined this with principles from existential coaching to ensure a non-normative stance, where the focus is on ‘describe, don’t explain’ (Spinelli, 2010). The protocol involves a warm-up exercise, a visualisation exercise with a strengths-based focus in pairs, and then working through a written case study provided by the facilitator. In this case study, which has been developed to closely reflect issues that could potentially arise in a real work context, an organisation is experiencing financial problems, amongst others. In pairs, participants are then requested to think of as many ideas as possible on how to address the organisation’s problems, their idea generation being interpreted as a ‘hard’, objective index of creativity.

**Control group**

Upon having completed the subjective, self-report measures of creativity, innovation and creative self-efficacy at baseline, the control group receives a briefing from a facilitator, and is then asked to work through a case study as aforementioned (section ‘intervention/experimental group’), recording ideas on how to address the organisation’s issues in pairs. They are then asked
to complete the self-report measures again, as well as a demographic background questionnaire. Finally, they are also reminded of the follow up (online) questionnaires being emailed to them in several weeks’ time.

Analysis
We will conduct appropriate group wise comparisons or analysis of variance (ANOVAs) depending on the normality of the data generated. If necessary, we can partial out any creativity-related work experience as a covariate, demographic data being gathered to control for this, if necessary.

As aforementioned, results of the study will be available for presentation and discussion at the time of the conference.

Selected references

