

Coaching Psychology and Ecopsychology: a first Italian study on the practice of coaching while walking in a green space

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Abstract

Background: Since 2020, individuals, communities, organizations and country systems are accelerating the trend to re-evaluate the importance of the relationship with nature and of physical activity for health, wellbeing and individual performance within the ecosystem. Thanks to the recent contributions from ecopsychology and from coaching psychology, this article investigates some of these effects in coaching.

Aims: The study aims to explore the potential benefits associated with a coaching session performed walking outdoors in a green space. The study examines whether a walk-and-talk instead of a sit-and-talk coaching session can improve wellbeing, vitality and some aspects of creative thinking of the coachee.

Methods: We asked attendees of a SCP Italy Peer Practice Group event to self-assess their level of wellbeing and vitality at the beginning and at the end of the walking coaching session, according to a 5-point Likert scale. We also explored the self-perception of the attendees - coach and coachee - (experimental group) regarding 'openness to different thoughts, perspectives and ideas', in order to explore the impact of the walking coaching session on creativity. A control group of 'walking only' is included in the study.

Results: The T-test results of the experimental and control groups show that the increase in vitality and wellbeing recorded in both groups is statistically significant in the case of the experimental group only.

Discussion: Further investigation is needed to understand to what extent the coaching session affects the increase in vitality and wellbeing and does not depend on other concomitant factors such as: weather conditions, the coach-coachee match, environment and socio-personal characteristics; and/or educational background.

Conclusions: The results of the study show that coaching practiced by walking outdoors positively influences the wellbeing and vitality of coach and coachee. The study reinforces what has already been identified in other research work (Palmer & O'Riordan, 2019; O'Riordan & Palmer, 2019).

Keywords: coaching, coaching psychology, ecopsychology, walking, green exercise.