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Recent Research

Julia Yates

Phoenix, Issue 170, February 2024

Coaching Chatbots

Nicky H. D. Terblanche, Michelle van Heerden & Robin Hunt (2024) The influence of an artificial intelligence chatbot coach assistant on the human coach-client working alliance, *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, DOI: [10.1080/17521882.2024.2304792](https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2024.2304792)

AI is surely going to have a major impact on our work, but the exact nature of its contribution seems to be, as yet, very unclear. This paper that explores the impact of an AI chatbot that operates alongside a human coach caught my eye. AI chatbot technology is still a long way from being ready to replace human coaches, but it is developing rapidly. The paper reports a small-scale qualitative study that explored the experiences of coaches and clients with *chatbot-assisted human coaching*, where a chatbot gave the coaching clients some automated support in between real-life coaching sessions. The bot offered text conversations that invited the clients to reflect, encouraged them to implement agreed actions, and got them to start planning for their next coaching session. The coaches and clients involved in the study both felt that the AI chatbot needed to be flexible, reliable and humane, and felt that the chatbot genuinely made a good contribution to the client's goal tracking and accountability. But where the coaches felt that the AI aspect of the intervention had a negative impact on the relationship between coach and client, the clients reported that it actually made it easier for them to feel psychological safe in the conversation. It makes some sense that a chatbot would be able to offer clients a genuinely non-judgemental environment, and it's interesting to see the difference in views of coaches and clients in this context.

Do employability programmes work?

R. Scandurra, D. Kelly, S. Fusaro, R. Cefalo & K. Hermansson (2023) Do employability programmes in higher education improve skills and labour market outcomes? A systematic review of academic literature, *Studies in Higher Education*, DOI: [10.1080/03075079.2023.2265425](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2265425)

This article reports on a systematic literature review that analysed 87 separate published papers that reported studies evaluating employability programmes in universities (mostly in the UK and Australia). A key finding was that the evidence base isn't good enough. In general, the research that evaluates employability activities is based on small scale case studies – from a single institution or within a single course and their limited scale means that it's hard to be confident about their findings or identify any causal impact on student development or labour market outcomes. The authors also noted that studies focus more often than not, on work-related learning (such as placements, internships or live projects), rather than embedded employability sessions within the curriculum. One interesting theme they noted was that whilst universities offer some excellent initiatives to help students develop their employability skills, students can remain somewhat 'naïve' about employability. Students are not necessarily aware of the work that they themselves need to do to capitalise on the opportunities offered, and are not always realistic about employers' expectations. The literature also highlighted the significant role of other confounding elements – in particular the impact of social and cultural capital: however effective an employability intervention is, students

from certain backgrounds still have some advantages. Finally, they noted that there are still too many examples of a skills mismatch between the skills students develop at university and those that employers are looking for.

Career Guidance for deaf people

Quirke, M., & Mc Guckin, C. (2024). The sound of silence: deconstructing notions of inclusion in career guidance on exploring the experience of deaf people. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 1-20.

This is another systematic literature review that asks whether career guidance is meeting the needs of deaf people. The study was conducted in Ireland, and a starting point for the authors was the realisation that there was no word for 'career' in Irish sign language, and that 'career guidance' was poorly understood by deaf people. The authors found just 12 relevant papers to look at – highlighting a clear lack of research in this area, and found that this community was viewed in the literature as 'disabled', informed by a *medical model of disability* which conceptualised people as lesser than their peers and needing to be 'fixed'. They contrast this approach with the more contemporary *social model of disability* which focuses on the ways that society disables people. Many deaf people do not consider themselves to have a disability, rather that they are part of a linguistic and cultural minority who face particular challenges in participating with services within society. The authors suggest that we perhaps need a cultural shift within our profession to make it more inclusive and they encourage us all to reflect on our own practices and assumptions, asking whether we might be held back by traditional approaches to inclusion and disability.

Social Mobility and Career Development

Perez, G., Duffy, R. D., Kim, H. J., & Kim, T. (2023). Social Mobility and Vocational Outcomes: A Psychology of Working Perspective. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 10690727231161380.

The findings of this study contain no great shocks, but it's always useful to remind ourselves of the impact that social mobility continues to have on career outcomes. This study looked at the impact of social mobility through the lens of the Psychology of Working Theory. This theory focuses on two psychological factors: *work volition* (the degree to which you feel that you have some control over your work and career) and *career adaptability* (your ability to cope with the ever-changing landscape of the modern labour market) that together lead to *decent work* (having a job where you are reasonably well-treated and rewarded). The study analysed a sample of 500 employed adults in the US and identified four profiles of social mobility: sustained privilege, sustained marginalisation / career barriers; upward mobility and downward mobility. They found that those who had sustained privilege and upward mobility had higher levels of work volition and decent work throughout their careers, compared with those in the other groups. Career adaptability, perhaps surprisingly, didn't appear to differ between groups. 10% of the cohort were in the upwardly mobile group and 12% in the downward mobile group, reminding us that social mobility works in both directions.