

# The effect of group-based life coaching on happiness and well-being

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**Abstract:** This study set out to test the hypothesis that overall well-being and happiness can be affected by a structured, supportive, peer coaching group that facilitates the positive aspects that contribute to happiness and well-being. This study examined the effects of a coaching workshop that takes an integrated and self-directed focus towards achievable congruent goals in all areas of life. The workshops encourage intrinsic motivation, self-knowledge, positive feeling, self-efficacy and growth. In a quasi-experimental two-factor design, 40 self-selected participants were randomly assigned to attend either a coaching workshop run once a week over a six-week period (experimental group n=23), or a control group (control group n=17). A series of 2x3 split plot analyses of variance were carried out with Time (pre v post v follow up) as the within participant factor and Group (experimental v control) as the between participants factor. All participants completed self-report measures for general happiness, psychological well-being, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, positive emotion and hope. These measures were completed before and after the experimental intervention and then again three months later. The experimental group attended at least four public life-coaching workshops over a six-week period. The control group also met once a week as an unstructured group in general discussion over the same time period and again were required to attend at least four times. The results for those in the experimental coaching group showed a significant effect compared to the control group. The number of participants was small yet the study produced some significant results, which were sustained for three months. Group life coaching can certainly be said to effect aspects of being that are known to be important contributors to intrinsic motivation, happiness and well-being.

**Key words:** life clubs; life coaching; happiness workshops; well-being

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## **Introduction**

Life coaching is an emerging and fast growing field that claims to support and facilitate change and personal development in all areas of life. It draws from a number of disciplines, including psychology, counselling, and sports coaching and uses methods from all these areas to support clients and help them move forward and achieve success and happier lives. The number of life coaching resources available is huge, however the research on coaching is limited compared with the growth in the industry, and studies on life coaching in particular are scarce (Grant, 2003; Linley, 2006). Life coaching is most often offered as an expensive commodity for individual clients. However the tools and methods can be experienced and practised in a workshop format, where people can experience coaching as a group. This can include peer coaching as well as individual reflection and insight. It is life coaching in a group format that this study was interested in examining.

### **Coaching and positive psychology**

Positive psychology examines all of the tenets that coaching claims to facilitate. 'Coaching serves as a perfect testing ground for the theories and scholarly ideas of positive psychology,' (Boniwell 2008). To date most of the research positive psychologists have conducted has been in business coaching. Research into coaching in non-executive and non-business communities has been largely neglected, (Biswas-Diener and Dean, 2007; Green et al, 2006). More experimental research, as well as more group-based research, with objective quantitative outcome measures is needed, (Stober and Grant, 2006; Greif, 2007).

We could find only two validated research papers on group based life coaching outside the business community or single issue support groups, at the time the study took place. Both studies used the 'coach yourself' life coaching group program (LCGP) developed by the researchers. (Grant 2003; Green et al, 2006). Green's initial study measured the effects on two groups, a life coaching group who followed a ten-week program 'coach yourself' (Green, 2004) and a waiting list control group. Green's programme ran for 10 weeks and consisted of a full day workshop followed by nine weekly one hour meetings. The

waiting list group received no intervention during this period and then received the intervention themselves. Green's research focussed on hope theory and goal achievement and is based on the premise that increases in goal achievement would affect well-being. She was also interested in the effect that life coaching would have on depression. This study differed slightly from Green's in that the coaching intervention was a different design and length, and in that the control group met during the intervention period as well.

## **The current study**

The overall efficacy of group and peer coaching and its effect on happiness and general and psychological well-being, was the main aim of the present study. Hope was used as a measure of action and a broad range of measures of well-being were used to assess the general effects of the intervention on well-being. Shane Lopez believes only the best coaches can grasp the in-depth aspects of positive psychology and that applying only popular notions and principles of the discipline, does little to improve peoples' lives (Kaufman & Linley 2007, p90). The concept of this research refutes this notion and aims to show that the tenets of positive psychology, that lie at the heart of the research programme, can be effective in lay hands. Also that when offered to the general population in a coaching workshop model that this is an accessible and informed way in which to examine and improve the quality of peoples' lives.

This study was a response to the lack of research into life coaching. It sought to examine life coaching in a non-business setting and was more interested in the effects of workshops that relied on peer coaching and self reflection, guided by clear exercises designed to facilitate insight, challenges and self learning. Although the group was led by a Life Club trained facilitator, the aim of the study was to measure the effect of the positive intervention more than the expertise of the coaching. Life Clubs were started in 2004 by Nina Grunfeld ([www.lifecclubs.co.uk](http://www.lifecclubs.co.uk)). They help to build social and emotional intelligence, communication and body language skills by developing personal insight, awareness and perspective. They use concepts from coaching, positive psychology, motivational interviewing, acceptance and commitment therapy,

neurolinguistic programming, relationship training and changing limiting beliefs (Grinfeld, 2006; 2006; 2009; 2010).

The aim of the study was to assess group based coaching that was

- Holistic: addressed all areas of life.
- Based on the principles and exercises contained within the model rather than the professionalism of the coach.
- Led by a trained facilitator but the coaching group also relied on peer support.
- Was designed to improve self-knowledge and self-discovery in order that any goals set are intrinsically motivated.
- Designed to challenge, champion and effect positive change.

This study set out to measure the workshops as an overall positive effect. To do this several measures were used to assess some of the main contributing factors of the larger constructs that are understood to be measures of, and contributing factors to happiness and well-being, and to assess the intervention as a combined and integrated package.

## **Hypothesis**

The study hypothesized that participants assigned to the Life Club (coaching) workshops would report significant increases in happiness, subjective well-being, self-efficacy, hope and psychological well-being in comparison to a control group. It was also hypothesized that the experimental coaching group would retain a significant positive effect in these areas three months after the intervention.

## **Method**

### **Design**

This was a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design programme. A series of 2x3 split-plot analyses of variance (ANOVAs) i.e. one for each dependent variable, were carried out with Time (pre-intervention v post-intervention v post intervention to follow-up) as the within participants factor and Group (Experimental v Control) as the between participants factor. The dependent variables were:

happiness, psychological well-being, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, positive emotion, and hope. The independent variable was a minimum attendance at four Life Club workshops over a six-week period.

### **Participants**

The participants were 40 adults (20-57 years). The majority of participants fell within the 26-35 and 36-45 age ranges (mean age 29). All the participants were recruited from the London area and were self-selecting. No psychological screening of participants was conducted. The participants were assigned to either the Life Coaching Group (experimental group n=23) or to a group who simply met together (control group n=17).

### **Procedure**

The Life Clubs workshops were advertised across a large database and network of organisations. Eight workshops were offered free of charge and advertised as a reward for being part of the research program. All the participants completed a set of pre-intervention (Time 1) self-report measures (as above). The participants were then assigned to either the experimental group or the control group after expressing a preference for attending on either Mondays or Wednesdays. Those that chose Wednesdays were assigned to the control group.

The experimental group (n=23) attended a minimum of four existing Life Club workshops once a week for six weeks, on either a Monday or Wednesday. The control group (n=17) met once a week only on a Wednesday, also for six weeks and simply talked of anything inconsequential. The meetings were unstructured and followed a conversational style. All participants met at the same venue for the same length of time. The group dynamic was slightly different each week because of the choice of workshops, as is the Life Club design. All the participants completed the questionnaires at the end of the six-week intervention period (Time 2) and again three months later (Time 3).

### **The intervention** (*The independent variable*)

The Life Club workshops (the intervention) are designed as a rolling

program that can be joined at any time. For the research program the workshops attended were the advertised program and were also attended by paying public.

The workshops were led by a trained facilitator from Life Clubs and involved both group and peer coaching. Approximately a third of the time was given to group discussion led by the facilitator. This introduced the focus of the workshop and allowed both guidance and sharing. A third of the time was given to peer one to one coaching and the final third of the time was spent on self-reflection.

### **Measures (Dependent variables)**

Participants completed all of the following questionnaires at Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3. Scales were chosen for their reliability and validity.

*Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)* (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995)

A 10 item measure. In samples from 23 nations, Cronbach's alphas ranged from .76 to .90, with the majority in the high .80s.

*The Satisfaction With Life Scale* (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985)

The SWLS was used to describe a person's global life satisfaction. It is a well-validated measure of subjective satisfaction with life that allows respondents to weight domains of their lives in terms of their own values (Pavot & Diener, 1993). This is a well-validated 5-item instrument. Cronbach alpha coefficients (0.80 to 0.89) and test-retest reliability values (0.54 to 0.83)

*Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)* (Watson, Clark and Tellegen, 1988)

A twenty item test, ten items measure positive affect: the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active and alert and 10 items measure negative affect: subjective distress and other adverse mood states and negative emotions. It has an Alpha coefficient of .86-90 for the positive affect test and .84-87 for the negative affect test. (Watson et al, 1988)

*Orientations to Happiness* (Peterson et al, 2005)

A fifteen item test that measures happiness in three ways: engagement or flow, pleasure and meaning. The test can be broken down to give

a separate result for engagement, eudemonic and hedonic aspects to happiness. A five point rating with internal consistencies reported by Peterson et al is said to be satisfactory (pleasure mean = 0.84, flow mean = 0.77 and meaning mean = 0.88, Peterson et al, 2005). This study is interested in the relationships between having a sense of purpose that supports goal congruence and satisfaction with life and happiness.

*The Adult Dispositional Hope Scale (GOALS SCALE)* (Snyder et al, 1991)  
A 12- item measure that measures two aspects of hope; agency and pathway. It is scored with an 8 point scale (where 1=definitely false and 8= definitely true) and is called the Goals Scale when administered to avoid distraction that the term hope can engender (Snyder et al 1997). This study will therefore title this questionnaire as Goals Scale. It consists of four agency items that measure the belief in one's ability to set and achieve goals and four pathway items that measure the ability to imagine and manage the process involved with fulfilling a goal. The last four items are filler questions and are not scored. Hope is the sum of the four pathways and four agency items. This measure is recognised as having good internal reliability. Test retest reliability suggest temporal stability up to an eight week period (Snyder et al, 1991). Alpha coefficients are also good (Agency = .71-.77 and Pathway = .63-.80)

*Psychological Well-Being* (Ryff, 1989)

Ryff's six part scale has been demonstrated to relate consistently to a wide variety of well-being and other psychological variables, including life satisfaction, affect balance, depression, morale, happiness, and self-esteem (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Well-being is a dynamic concept that includes subjective, social, and psychological aspects The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being is a measure that specifically focuses on all areas of psychological well-being. The six sub scales and their alpha values are as follows:

- *Autonomy*, Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) = .83
- *Environmental mastery*, Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) = .86
- *Positive relationships with others*, Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) = .88
- *Purpose in life*, Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) = .88

- *Personal growth*, Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) = .85
- *Self-acceptance*. Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) = .91

These scales are theoretically grounded (Ryff, 1989) and have been validated in numerous studies employing community and nationally representative samples (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Ryff (1989) found that the co-efficient alphas for the 14-item form ranged from 0.87 to 0.93. For practical purposes this study has chosen to use the nine item test which totals 56 items overall.

## **Statistical analyses**

Prior to analysis, scores on the dependent variables were examined using SPSS Version 11.1 for accuracy of data entry, missing values and fit between their distributions and the assumptions of analyses utilized. To examine differences in the samples scores from Time 1 to Time 2 to Time 3, 3 x 2 repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted on scores for each of the dependent variables. Where the interaction effects of Time and Group were found to be significant, further analyses were conducted to examine between group differences within times, pair wise comparisons of group means at Time 1 and 2, Time 1 and 3, and between Time 2 and 3 were made, using the Bonferroni statistic to control for multiple comparisons. T tests were also carried out on the experimental coaching group over time and for the control group to assess the within-subjects effects. Mauchly's test of sphericity was measured and when significant the analysis used was Greenhouse–Gieser.

## **Results**

The aim of the study was to compare the scores of the experimental group to the control group after the intervention (Time 2) and after a further three months (Time 3). The mean scores for each group (experimental and control) at Times 1, 2 and 3 (pre, post and follow up) were taken from the descriptive statistics used in the repeated measure analysis of the data. These are the results:



## Happiness and subjective well-being

### *Satisfaction with Life*

Table 1

Means and standard deviations for satisfaction with life

Variable	Experimental Group 1 (n=20)			Control Group 2 (n=11)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Satisfaction with Life						
Mean	18.40	21.85	21.50	18.36	19.90	21.01
SD	6.12	6.53	7.3	6.7	6.6	5.7

There was a significant main effect for Time ( $F_{2, 58} = 10.94$ ,  $p < .001^{**}$ ). A post hoc analysis, paired sample t-tests using a criterion value for statistical significance set at 0.016, revealed that participants in the experimental group experienced a significant increase in well-being immediately after group sessions ended ( $t_{39} = 4.50$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ) and between pre test and follow up ( $t_{30} = 4.15$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ).

### *Orientations to happiness*

In three parts: 1. Pleasure. 2. Meaning and 3. Engagement. The data for all three parts were analysed separately.

Table 2

Means and standard deviations for orientation to happiness

Variable	Experimental Group 1 (n=20)			Control Group 2 (n=11)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Orientation to Happiness: – Total						
Mean	60.95	65.20	65.95	58.18	59.45	61.18
SD	7.5	8.9	10.2	8.6	6.1	6.5
Orientation to Happiness – Pleasure						
Mean	20.35	23.20	22.30	22.36	21.09	20.81
SD	4.1	3.6	4.7	3.9	3.7	4.4
Orientation to Happiness – Meaning						
Mean	22.60	22.65	23.70	18.09	19.81	21.72
SD	3.5	4.6	4.7	5.2	5.3	5.2
Orientation to Happiness-Engagement						
Mean	18.00	19.35	19.95	17.72	18.54	18.63
SD	3.8	4.0	4.3	5.1	3.6	4.4

- The data for Pleasure showed there was a significant interaction effect between Group and Time ( $F_{2,58} = p < .005^{**}$ ). A simple effects analysis revealed two significant comparisons.
- Between pre and post test, the experimental group experienced a significant increase in pleasure, ( $F_{1,29} = 9.97, p < .005^{**}$ )
- Between post test and follow up, the experimental group reported a significant increase in pleasure, ( $F_{1,29} = 6.72, p < .05$ ) while the control group decreased slightly.
- The data for Meaning revealed there was a trend.
- The data for Engagement revealed no significant effects

*Positive and Negative Affect*

Table 3  
Means and standard deviations for PANAS

Variable	Experimental Group 1 (n=20)			Control Group 2 (n=11)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Positive Affect						
Mean	33.70	38.00	36.10	31.36	28.90	32.54
SD	6.2	7.2	5.9	10.0	12.0	7.8
Negative Effect						
Mean	27.30	23.00	23.1	28.36	25.3	22.27
SD	8.9	9.0	9.0	10.0	9.6	7.9

- *Positive Affect:* Although there was no significant effect for the interaction between Group and Time, When a 2x2 repeated measure analysis was conducted the results for the interaction between Group and Time were significant ( $F_{1,38} = 5.09, p < .05^*$ ).
- *Negative Affect:* The main effect for Time was significant ( $F_{2,58} = 9.138, p < .001^*$ ). Paired sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced a significant decrease in negative affect
- Between pre and post test ( $t_{22} = 4.479, p < .001$ )
- Between pre and follow-up ( $t_{19} = 2.481, p < .05$ )

## Hope

Table 4  
Means and standard deviations for Hope

Variable	Experimental Group 1 (n=20)			Control Group 2 (n=11)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Adult State Hope (Goals Scale)						
Mean	47.05	51.10	49.35	46.45	45.63	49.36
SD	8.6	6.7	8.1	20.2	8.2	9.0
Adult State Hope (Goals Scale)-pathways						
Mean	24.30	26.25	25.54	23.90	24.00	25.7
SD	4.9	4.3	4.6	4.7	4.5	4.6
Adult State Hope (Goals Scale)-Agency						
Mean	22.75	24.85	23.90	22.54	21.63	23.63
SD	4.5	3.9	4.5	4.7	4.7	4.6

- There was a significant interaction between time and group ( $F_{2, 58} = 3.55$   $p < 0.05^*$ ). A simple effects analysis was carried out on the interaction data. This revealed two significant interactions.
- From post test to follow up, those in the control group reported an increase in hope, while the experimental group decreased slightly.
- Between pre and post test, those in the experimental group experienced a significant increase in Hope, whereas those in the control group experienced a decrease in hope.

## Self efficacy

Table 5

Mean scores and standard deviations for *Generalised Self Efficacy*

Variable	Experimental Group 1 (n=20)			Control Group 2 (n=11)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Pre test v post test v follow up						
Mean	28.6	31.35	30.7	31.00	30.81	33.00
SD	4.4	4.9	5.0	5.4	4.6	3.7

  

Variable	Experimental Group 1 (n=23)			Control Group 2 (n=17)		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Pre test vPost test						
Mean	28.34	30.78		31.17	31.17	
SD	4.7	5.1		4.6	3.8	

- The measure used was the *Generalised Self Efficacy Test* (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995). There was a significant main effect for Time ( $F_{2, 58} = 4.40$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). A post hoc analysis using paired sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced a significant increase in self efficacy immediately after group sessions ended ( $t_{39} = 2.47$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and between pre test and follow up ( $t_{30} = 2.66$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- There was a strong trend between those in the control and experimental groups over the 3 periods, ( $F_{2, 58} = 2.84$ ,  $p = 0.06$  \*). When an analysis was done with a 2 x 2 repeated measure (ANOVA) with Group (experimental v control) and Time (pre test, post test,) as factors, the results were significant for an interaction between the groups pre and post test ( $F_{1, 38} = 4.98$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- The experimental group showed a significant increase in self efficacy after the period of the intervention (Time 2) compared to the control group.

## Psychological well-being

### *Personal Growth*

There was a significant main effect for the interaction between Group

and Time (F 2,58 =5.43. p < 05). A simple effects analysis was carried out on the interaction data, which revealed two significant comparisons:

- Between Time 1 and Time 2 those in the experimental group experienced a significant increase in personal growth, (F 1,29 = 6.34, p<0.05\*).
- Between Time 1 and Time 3 the experimental group also reported a significant increase in personal growth, (F 1,29 = 6.91, p<0.05\*).

#### *Purpose in life*

A significant main effect was found for the interaction between Group and Time (F 2,58 =3.82. p < .05). A simple effects analysis was carried out on the interaction data, which revealed three significant comparisons, those in the experimental group experienced a significant increase in purpose in life:

- Between Time 1 and Time 2 (pre and post test), (F 1,29 = 5.85, p<0.05).
- Between Time 2 and Time 3 (post test and follow up): (F 1,29 = 6.60, p<.05) and Between Time 1 and Time 3 (pre and follow up): (F 1,29) = 6.60, p <05).

#### *Self acceptance*

There was an effect for Time. (F 2, 58 =5.51 p<.05). Paired sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced a significant increase in self acceptance

- Between Time 1 and Time 2 (t 38 = 4.09 , p<0.001\*\*) and
- Between Time 1 and Time 3 (t31 = 2.48, p<0.05).
- This main effect was modified by a significant interaction between Group and Time (F 2,58 =3.47. p < .05\*). A simple effects analysis was carried out on the interaction data, which revealed one significant comparison.
- Between Time 1 and Time 2 those in the experimental group experienced a significant increase in self acceptance, (F 1,29 = 7.31, p<0.05).

### **Environmental mastery**

There was a significant effect for Time. ( $F(2, 58) = 5.27, p < .05$ ). Paired sample t-tests revealed that participants experienced a significant increase in *Environmental Mastery*:

- Between Time 1 and Time 2 ( $t(38) = 3.61, p < 0.005^{**}$ ) and
- Between Time 1 and Time 3 ( $t(31) = 2.88, p < 0.05$ ).
- There was no significant interaction between Group and Time.
- Those in the experimental coaching group increased significantly compared to the control group in

Personal Growth both at the time of the intervention and three months later.

Purpose in Life over all three time comparisons.

Self Acceptance after the intervention.

### *Autonomy*

There were no significant results for *autonomy*.

### *Positive Relations with Others*

There were no significant results for *positive relations with others*.

### **All Measures comparison**

Between Time 1 and Time 2 those in the experimental group experienced a significant increase in effect across all the variables measured, ( $F(1,28) = 8.87, p < 0.006$ ) compared to the control group.

### **Within-subjects effects**

Within subjects effects for the experimental group over time were also analysed. A simple effects analysis was taken, paired contrasts tests in a repeated analysis were conducted for the Experimental Group between Times 1 and 2, and between Times 1 and 3. The significant results for the measures for overall subjective well-being are listed in table 8. The results showed a consistent effect across nearly all of the variables and for all the variables that showed an effect at Time 2 there was also an effect for Time 3. The only exceptions to this were *Self-efficacy* and

*Positive Affect* which did not sustain the significant effect at Time 3 and *Engagement* (OTH) which had an effect at Time 3 but not at Time 2.

Table 8  
Significant repeated measures pair-wise comparisons of effects on the experimental (coaching) group for all variables between Time 1 and 2, and between Time 1 and 3

Variable	Time	Df	F	Sig
Life satisfaction	1 and 2	1,19	19.929	.000
	1 and 3	1,19	8.380	.009
Positive affect	1 and 2	1,19	3.857	.008
Negative affect	1 and 2	1,19	16.409	.001
	1 and 3	1,19	6.154	.023
Orientations to happiness				
Pleasure	1 and 2	1,19	12.519	.002
	1 and 3	1,19	5.107	.036
Engagement	1 and 3	1,19	7.120	.015
Purpose in Life				
PWB	1 and 2	1,19	16.924	.001
	1 and 3	1,19	4.948	.038
Self Acceptance				
PWB	1 and 2	1,19	41.592	.000
	1 and 3	1,19	7.363	.014
Personal Growth				
PWB	1 and 2	1,19	7.275	.014
	1 and 3	1,19	4.631	.044
Enviromental Mastery PWB	1 and 2	1,19	6.170	.022
	1 and 3	1,19	7.361	.014
Generalised Self Efficacy	1 and 2	1,19	15.145	.001
	1 and 3	1,19	6.353	.021
Hope-Goals scale	1 and 2	1,19	10.512	.004

### **T tests**

The results for the experimental group were also analysed for within-group effects over time with paired samples t tests. This analysis showed significant results over time for both Time 2 and Time 3 for all the variables except Meaning (OTH), Autonomy (PWB) and Positive Relations with Others PWB).

### **Control group tests**

A similar simple paired analysis was conducted for the control group over the three time periods for all the variables and the results showed only two significant effects. Life Satisfaction improved for the control group at both Time 2 and Time 3 and Environmental Mastery improved at Time 2. All other variables were not significant.

### **Discussion**

This study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of group life coaching delivered as weekly workshops on *happiness* and *subjective well-being*. It also assessed the effect of the coaching on *hope*, *self-efficacy* and *psychological well-being*. The results showed that the participants who attended the Life Club workshops improved across all the variables in comparison to the control group. The effects across all the variables for the experimental group were greater than the effects for the control group and when analysed for within-subjects effects, the results were significant in all but three sub measures. When all the variables were examined as one total measure for all the aspects and factors under scrutiny, the results showed a strong significant effect.

#### **Increase in aspects that build self knowledge**

The results showed that attending the Life Club workshops had the most significant effect on those aspects that focused on a better experience of the self: *personal growth*, *self acceptance*, *purpose in life*, and *pleasure*. The participants in the group coaching program also experienced a significant increase in *hope* and showed a marked trend in improved *self-efficacy*. The findings also showed an increase in *satisfaction with life*, a decrease in *negative affect* and an increase in *positive affect*. The most significant effect was for *pleasurable orientation to happiness*.

#### **Effects of coaching on dimensions within psychological well-being**

*Positive relations with others* was not a significant effect and in fact decreased for the experimental group over the whole experimental period. This could be because the emphasis of the workshops was



for self analysis. The experimental group were initially high scorers on this scale which indicates a concern for the welfare of others (Ryff and Singer, 2008) it could be quite understandable that given the opportunity to focus on their own needs this dimension might reduce. However, more research would need to be carried out to back up what is merely speculation.

The very marked lack of effect in *autonomy* for either group was also interesting, and was matched by Green's research. It can perhaps be surmised that group life coaching is not promoting this aspect of well-being that Ryff describes as the 'most western' of all the dimensions of her measure.

Within the psychological well-being questionnaire scores on three dimensions increased significantly: *Self acceptance*: knows and accepts multiple aspects of the self both good and bad, and is a characteristic of self actualisation, optimal functioning, maturity and mental health. *Personal growth*: open to new experiences able to change and realise potential. *Purpose in life*: able to put the former dimension into action and has the ability to see meaning and create a purposeful direction. That these three aspects scored highly compared to the control group is strong evidence that the group based workshops offered effective coaching.

### **Effects on hope and self efficacy**

The combination of improved *self-efficacy*, and general self-development in the categories above in relation to improvements in *dispositional hope* implies a very real change in the ability to set and achieve goals and to imagine and manage the process involved with fulfilling a goal. *Hope* however was not sustained after the initial effect of the workshops. That there was a significant effect on *hope* at Time 2 compared to the control group and that *purpose in life* (see above) was effected significantly indicates that the workshops improved the ability to set goals with an intrinsic purpose and aim, the effects of *purpose in life* were significant across all three time comparisons compared to the control group.

### **Orientations to happiness**

*Pleasure* was the only aspect of the orientation to happiness measure that

was significant between the two groups however *meaning* and *engagement* showed a trend over time and for *engagement* this was significant. The effect of the coaching workshops to improve both *pleasure* and *positive affect* supported the premise that if the intervention increases *positive affect*, this in itself would facilitate creativity and growth. The design of the workshops was to generate more fun and happiness and increase in this aspect within the happiness measure is completely congruent with the workshop format.

### **Meaning v purpose in life**

It was interesting to note that *meaning* showed little effect when *purpose in life* was significant, the constructs however are entirely different and the results highlighted this. The personal goal orientation of the questions in *purpose in life* (PWB) reflects much more Frankl and Lasch's (1992) concept of meaning in regard to how one perceives life events. The tone of the questions that come under the *meaning* aspect to OTH may appear more dutiful and egocentric to British rather than American participants.

### **Effects over time**

The following variables kept a significant effect over time: *satisfaction with life*, *negative affect*, *pleasure* (OTH), *purpose in life* (PWB), *self acceptance* (PWB), *environmental mastery* (PWB), *personal growth*, (PWB) and *self efficacy*.

### **Control group issues**

One of the problems this research encountered was the commitment of the participants especially in the control group. Most studies experience a certain level of participant dropout. Those in the experimental group were understandably more committed but of the initial number who responded to advertising (75) only 49 started the research program.

The control group met as a group in order to mitigate the possibility that joining a group regularly would in itself have an effect. The results showed that the control group did experience a significant increase in

*Life Satisfaction, Environmental Mastery (PWB) and less Negative Affect*, they also showed a positive trend in *meaning (OTH), engagement (OTH) and self efficacy*, this mitigated the significance of the interaction between the groups in these variables.

The differences in effect between the two groups is most clearly seen when comparing the significant within-subjects effects results. Comparing these results highlights the effects of the coaching intervention and shows that the workshops supported and encouraged self-discovery and pleasure over and above the more general positive effects the control group experienced. The number of participants was smaller than desirable as both groups had less than 25 in number. However, the results showed a consistent effect for the experimental group in comparison to the control group.

### **The study and positive psychology**

Research findings show that the strategies healthy people use to further their own development are in contrast to many of the mainstream approaches employed among mental health professionals (Henry 2006, p.131). Jane Henry has found that the strategies people find most helpful to their personal development are practices and beliefs that encourage finding purpose in value based engagement, future orientation and a positive attitude to life and learning. These strategies were encouraged in the Life Club workshops and are very much in line with the key principles of life-coaching. Positive psychology is validating this marked contrast, starting with the perspective that the person at the centre of the research or examination is already fully functioning and examining what *enhances* and is common to positive functioning. Good coaching works emphatically from this perspective. 'The mission of positive psychology is to develop sound theories of optimal functioning and to find empirically supported ways to improve the lives of ordinary and extraordinary people' (Kaufman, 2006 p.219).

### **Conclusions**

The present study may have benefitted from combining some qualitative research in order to flesh out more detail however it is the whole

package rather than its parts that was under scrutiny. The number of participants was small, however, that there were significant effects despite this, and in comparison to a control group, makes the study worthy of note. The close replication of Green's results is also significant. Green and Grunfeld designed their workshops very differently. Grunfeld has incorporated a wide variety of ideas into the life club format that draws on her own personal experience of what works (Grunfeld, 2006; 2007; 2009; 2010). Green on the other hand emphasises a cognitive psychological and academically informed design. That the results were so similar might imply that the effect of any time spent using coaching strategies that afford learning and development of the self in action will positively affect overall well-being and happiness. It might seem too obvious to say that time spent examining how we are living and being encouraged to become more proactive and cognisant of the choices we are making, is time well spent however one does this.

Quantitative positive psychology research has tended to focus on single interventions. This research has shown how just a short period of coaching, delivered as group coaching workshops, that allowed individuality and variety within the intervention design, can affect a significant number of well-being factors. The significant overall effect across all the measures taken together is evidence that the form of coaching under examination was effective and merits more research.

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