Twenty Years of Solution-focused Coaching Research at the University of Sydney

Outcomes, Insights and Tools for Practitioners

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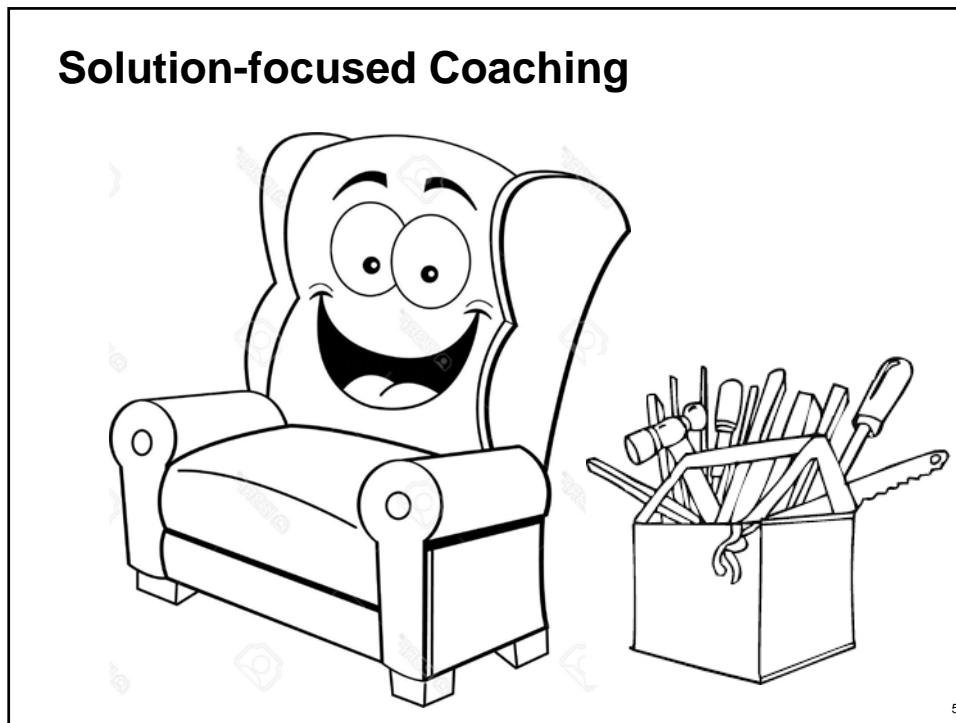University of Sydney
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Overview

- Background information
- The Psycho-mechanics of Solution-focused Coaching
- The Solution-focused Thinking Inventory
- Key Coaching Research Findings
- Problem or Solution Focused?
- Q & A

- Have a nice cup of tea!

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Who Are We?

Solution-focused Coaching
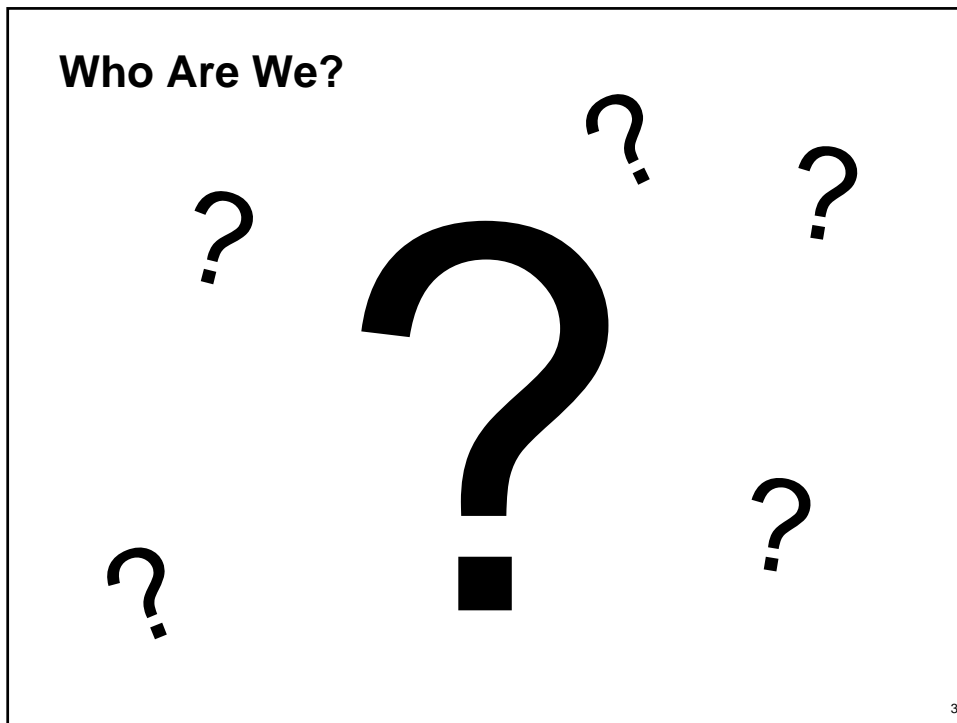
1. The Psycho-mechanics of Coaching

Three Key Facets

Goal Orientation	**Problem Disengagement**	**Resource Activation**
Identify preferred outcome and orientate self towards goal	Disengage from problem-focused thinking	Indentify and activate resources and strengths

The Solution-focused Thinking Inventory

The Solution-focused Thinking Inventory

1. Goal Orientation
- I imagine my goals and then work towards them
- I keep track of my progress towards my goals
- I'm very good at developing effective action plans
- I always achieve my goals

2. Problem Disengagement
- I tend to spend more time analysing my problems than working on possible solutions *
- I tend to get stuck in thinking about problems *
- I tend to focus on the negative *
- I'm not very good at noticing when things are going well *

3. Resource Activation
- There is always a solution to every problem
- There are always enough resources to solve a problem if you know where to look
- Most people are more resilient than they realise
- Setbacks are a real opportunity to turn failure into success

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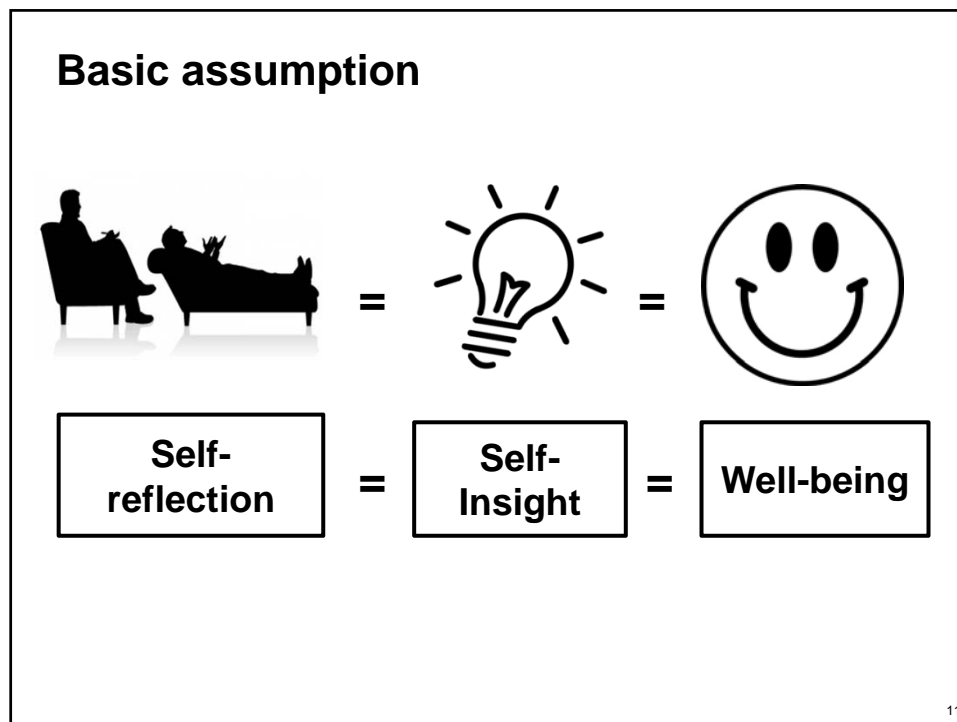# The Psycho-mechanics of Coaching
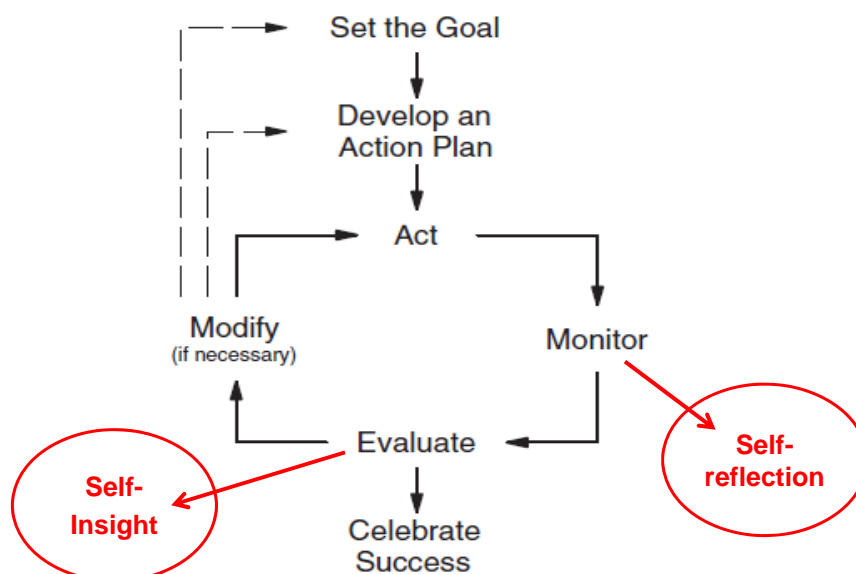
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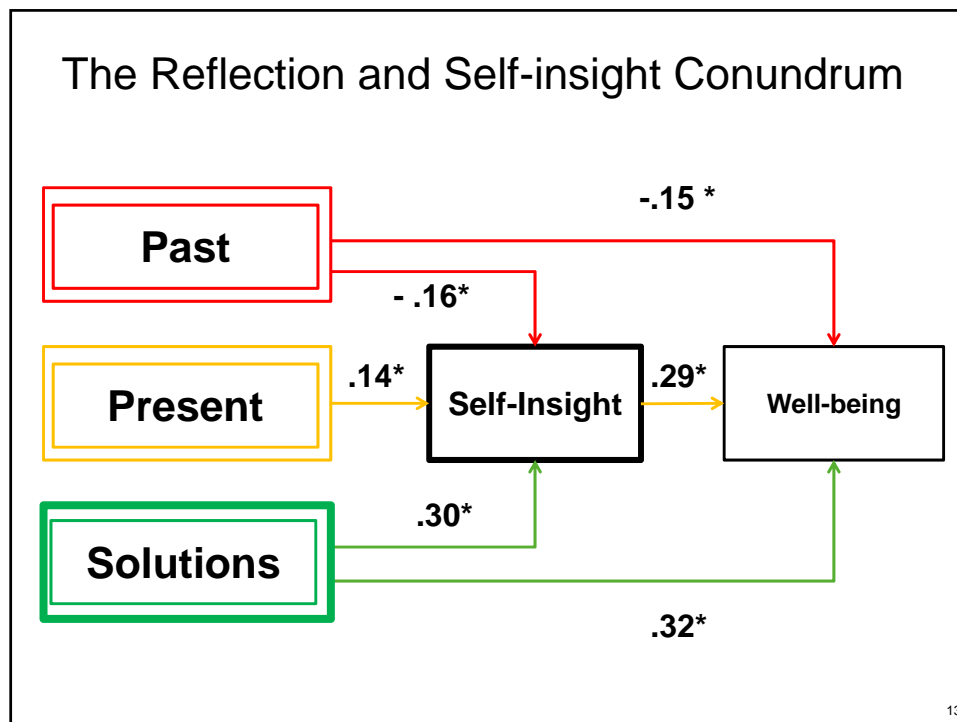# Self-reflection

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Self-insight

"Internal State Awareness"

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Basic assumption

| Self-reflection | = | Self-Insight | = | Well-being |

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But self-reflection does not necessarily equal self-insight

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The Reflection and Self-insight Conundrum

Past			-.15 *

- .16*

| Present | .14* | Self-Insight | .29* | Well-being |

| Solutions | .30* |

.32*

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What does this tell us about solution-focused approaches?

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Warning

Fast talking and small font ahead

A (Very) Brief Overview of
Twenty Years of Solution-focused Coaching Research at the University of Sydney

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Coaching Outcome Studies (approximately 30 U.Syd)

- **Solution-focused, goal-orientated cognitive-behavioural coaching is effective and the most validated approach** [1]

1. Coaching enhances goal attainment
- In wide range of populations - executives [2], community populations [3] youth [4] teachers [5] students [6] and health care settings [7] even during organisational change [8]

2. Coaching enhances well-being and SF thinking skills
- Greater resilience [10] greater PWB [11], higher self-concepts [12], greater self-efficacy, reduced depression, anxiety and stress [13], increased workplace well-being [5] Increased insight [14], increased solution-focused thinking [15] and deepenes learning [12]

3. Effects of coaching generalise to other areas
- Qualitative reports indicate that self-regulation skills developed in coaching generalise to a wide range of other life areas [7,8]

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The Psycho-mechanics of Coaching

- **Self-reflection (SR), goal attainment and well-being**
  - SR not always related to goal attainment (Grant, 2003; Silva et al 2011)
  - SR not always related to well-being or self-insight (Lyke, 2008)
  - Replicated in cultures worldwide (Europe, Australia, China, Japan, Brazil, Turkey, Korea, Taiwan)

- **Insight, well-being and self-regulation**
  - Self-insight strongly related to well-being (Grant, 2003; Harrington & Loffredo, 2011;Stein & Grant, 2014)
  - Self-insight strongly related to self-regulation (Cheers, 2014)
  - Coaches with behavioural science background create greater self-insight and job performance in coachees (Bozer et al, 2014)
  - Coach training enhances self-insight in trainee coaches (Grant, 2008)

- **Implications for coaching practice**
  - Be aware of types of self-refection we encourage in clients
  - Focus on fostering self-insight through coaching
  - Psychology (behavioural science) counts in coaching practice

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Coach-coachee Relationship Studies

1. Professional vs Peer Coaches

- Both professional and non-professional coaches can be very effective agents of change [16]
- Professional coaches are more effective than non-professional coaches, but both are effective [11]

2. A goal-focused coaching relationship is the key to coaching success

- A goal-focused coaching relationship is the key to coaching success [17]
- Need collaborative, but outcome focused conversations, rather than counselling-like exploration [18]

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Warning

Interactive exercise ahead!

- Q: What's confirmed what you already "know"?

- Q: What's surprised you?

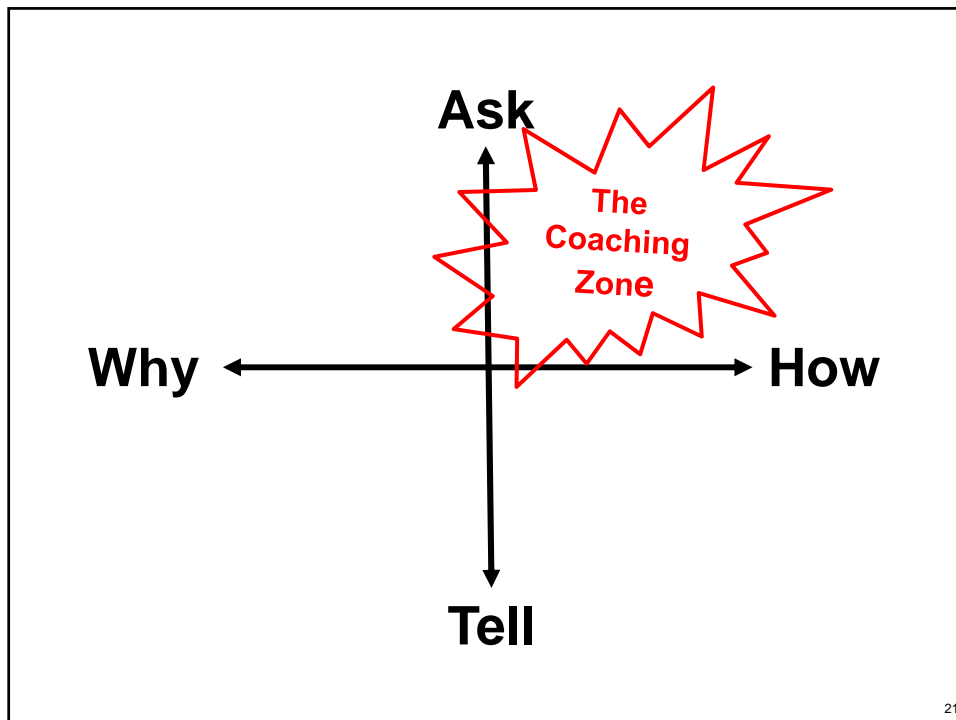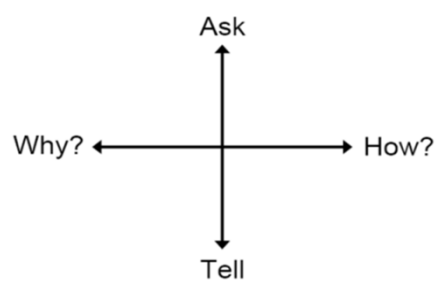- Q: What questions do you have for a Q&A session?

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Are problem-focused coaching questions effective?

Problem-focused or Solution-focused Coaching Questions?

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Ask

Why ←→ **How**

The Coaching Zone

Tell

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Solution or Problem Focus?

Ask

Why? ←→ How?

Tell

- Should you ask "How" or "Why"?
- Solution or Problem Focus?
- Impact on: Positive and Negative Affect; Self-efficacy, Goal Approach and Action Step Generation

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Should you ask "Why?" or "How?"

Problem-focused Questions N = 108	Solution-focused Questions N = 117
1. Identify real-life problem 2. Complete measures T1 3. Answer PF coaching questions 4. Re-take measures T2	1. Identify real-life problem 2. Complete measures T1 3. Answer SF coaching questions 4. Re-take measures T2

Random Assignment

Grant, A. M. (2012). Making Positive Change: A Randomized Study Comparing Solution-Focused Vs. Problem-Focused Coaching Questions. *Journal of Systemic Therapies, 31*(2), 21-35.

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Goal Identification Statement

- "Please take five minutes to write about a problem that you have *that you would like to solve*. It should be one that is frustrating for you and one that you have not, as yet, been able to solve. This problem should be real and personal, but something you feel comfortable sharing about. "

- Both groups responded to this statement

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Condition One
**Answered Problem-focused Coaching Questions**

- Think about the problem.
- How long has this been a problem? How did it start?
- What are your thoughts about this problem?
- How do you react when you have those thoughts?
- What impact is thinking about this issue having on you?
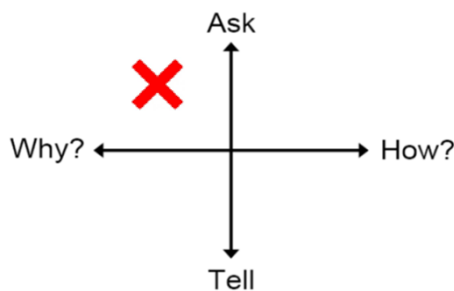
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Condition Two
Answered Solution-focused Coaching Questions

- Think about a possible solution to the problem you have just described and imagine it had "magically" come about. Describe some ways you could you move towards creating this solution.

- What are your thoughts about this solution?
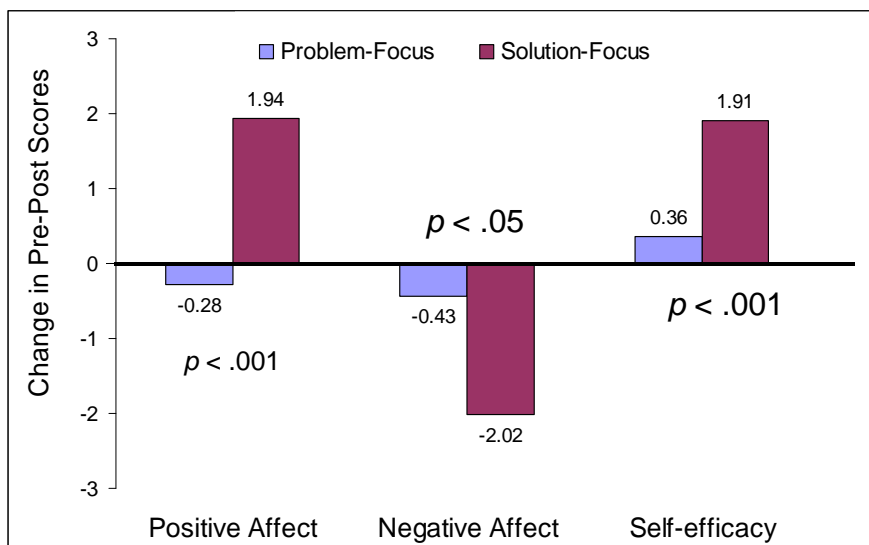- What impact is thinking about this solution having on you?
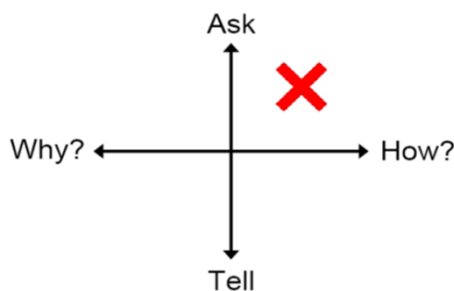
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Outcome Measures

- **Pre and Post**
  - Positive and Negative Affect (PANAS)
  - Self-efficacy
  - Goal Approach (Goal attainment scaling)

- **Post only**
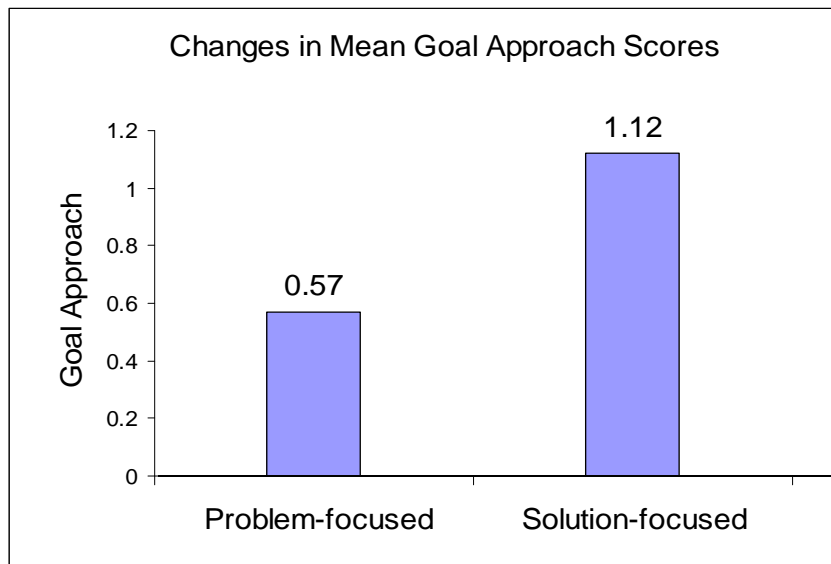 - Generate a number of Action Steps
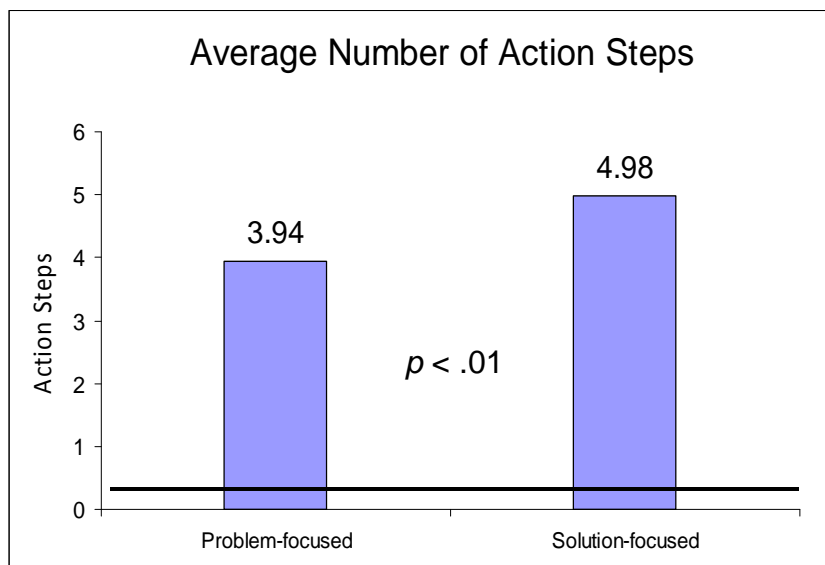
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Problem vs Solution Questions

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Changes in Mean Goal Approach

Changes in Mean Goal Approach Scores

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Average Number of Action Steps

Average Number of Action Steps

$p < .01$

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So, should you Ask "How?" or "Why?"

- SF "How" seems to be the "better" way for coaching …

- More positive affect ✓
- Greater self-efficacy ✓
- Greater goal approach ✓
- More action steps ✓

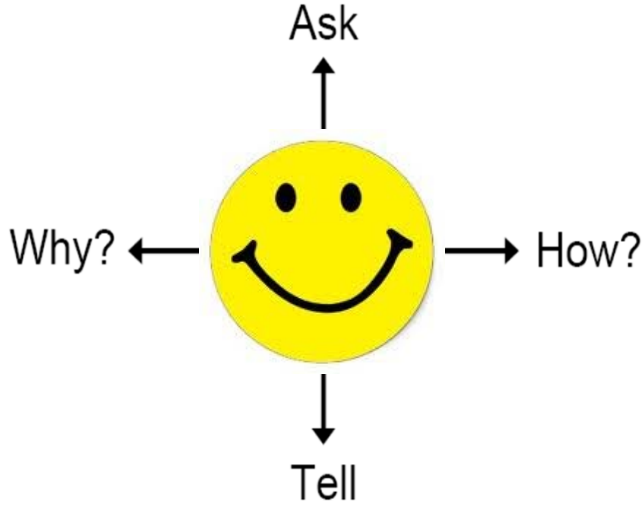SOLUTION

BUT

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- But what about the effects of positive affect?

- Was "success" just due to a *"feel-good"* factor?

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Study Two
Should you be Solution-focused or just make them happy?

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Explore the Role of Positive Affect

- **Random assignment to one of four conditions of Coaching Questions**

1. Problem-focused Questions PF (n = 124)
2. Solution-focused Questions SF (n = 119)
3. **Positive Affect-focused Questions PA (n = 122)**
4. **Positive Affect + Solution-focused PA+SF (n = 123)**

- **Outcome Measures**
1. Positive and Negative Affect
2. Self-efficacy
3. Goal Approach
4. Action Steps

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Solution-focused or Happy-dappy?

PF N = 124	SF N = 119	PA N = 122	PA+SF N = 123
1. State problem 2. Measures T1 3. Answer PF 4. Measures T2	1. State problem 2. Measures T1 3. Answer SF 4. Measures T2	1. State problem 2. Measures T1 3. Answer PA 4. Measures T2	1. State problem 2. Measures T1 3. Answer PA+SF 4. Measures T2

Random Assignment

Grant, A. M., & O'Connor, S. A. (2018). Broadening and Building Solution-Focused Coaching: Feeling Good Is Not Enough.
Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice.

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Positive Affect Condition (Savouring)

- "We would now like you to think about a pleasant event that you have experienced. It could be a recent event or one from the past. It should be an event that you would enjoy writing about and sharing. Please describe the pleasant event in detail below: Take at least 5 minutes to answer".

- "Spend a few minutes making some notes on a piece of paper and thinking about your responses and then type in your responses".

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Pre-Post Impact on **Positive Affect**

Pre-Post Impact on **Negative Affect**

Pre-Post Impact on **Self-efficacy**

Pre-Post Impact on **Goal Approach**

Impact on **Action Steps**

Change in Pre-Post Scores (y-axis: 3.5 to 6)

- SF better than PF
- SF = PA
- **Better than all others** (circled) — PA+SF 5.8

PF	SF	PA	PA+SF
PF 4.3	SF 4.8	PA 5	PA+SF 5.8

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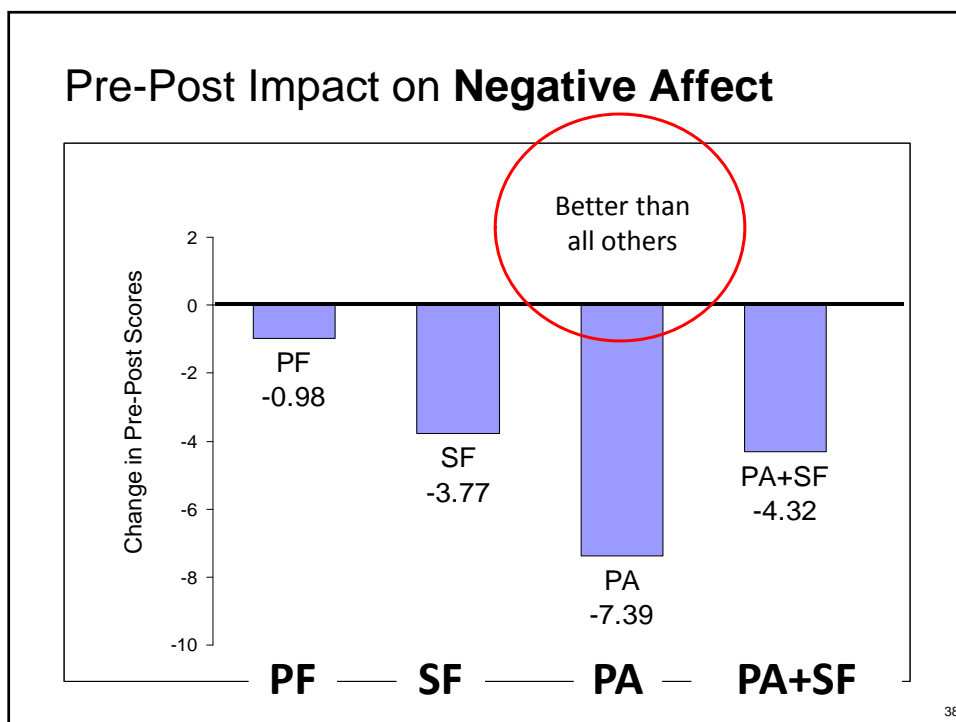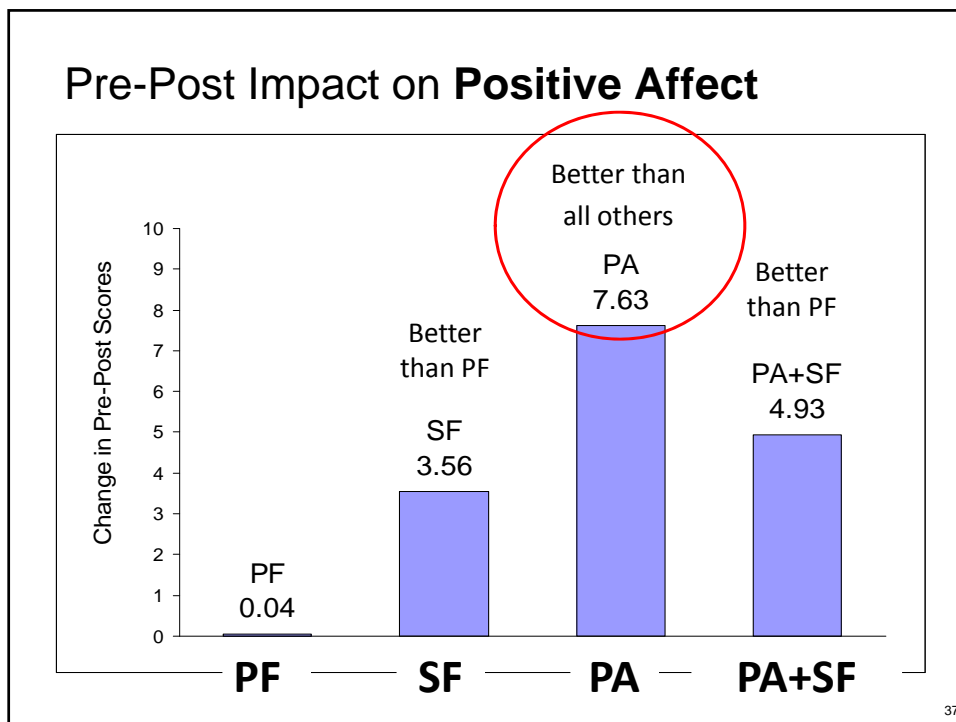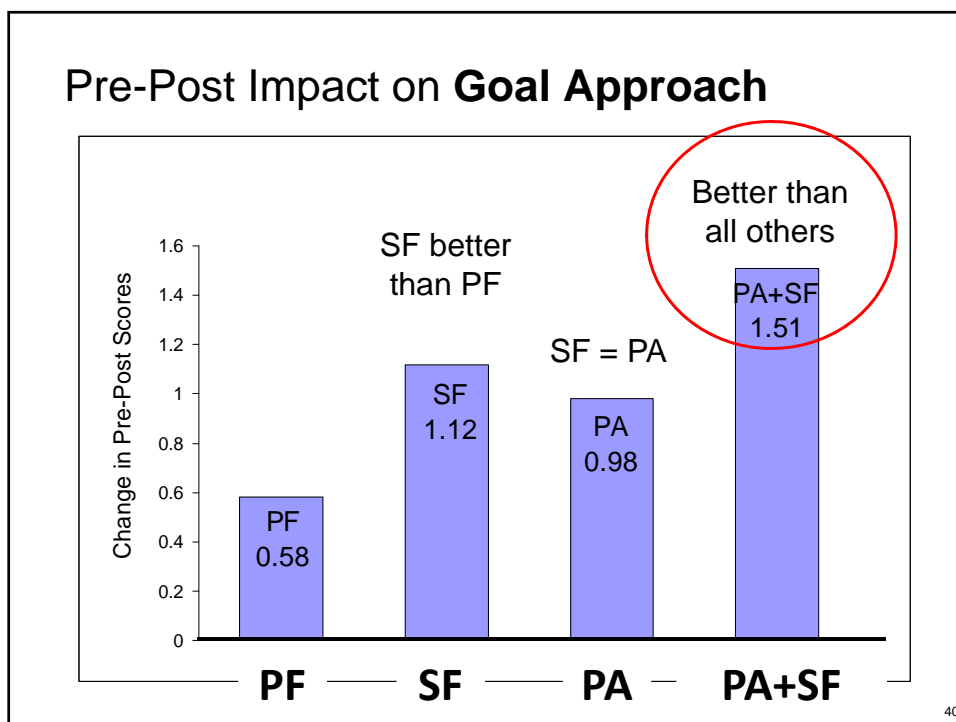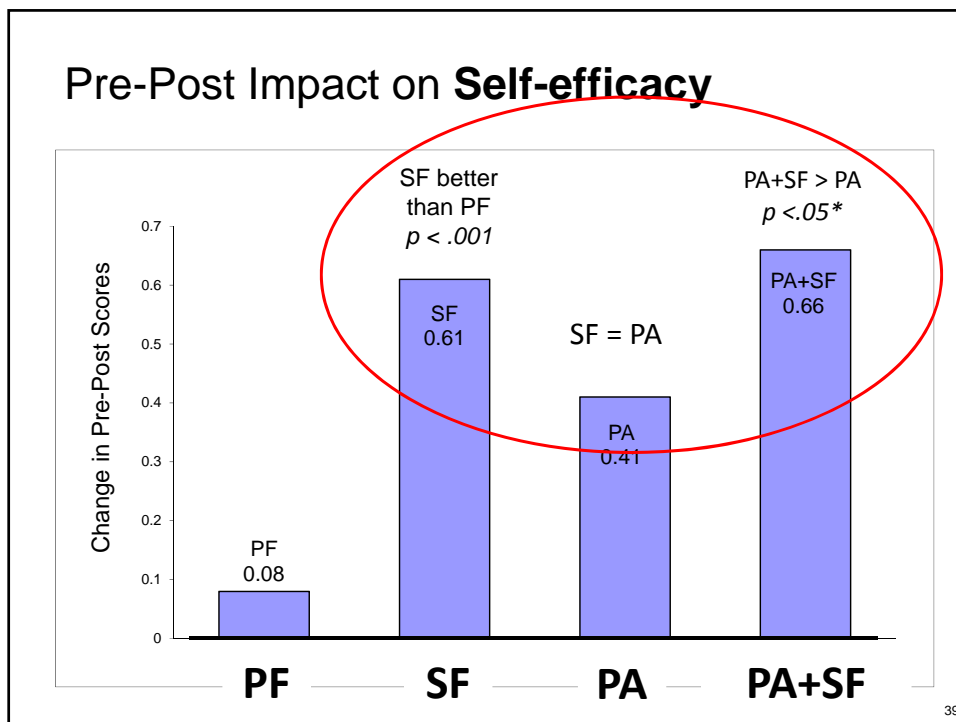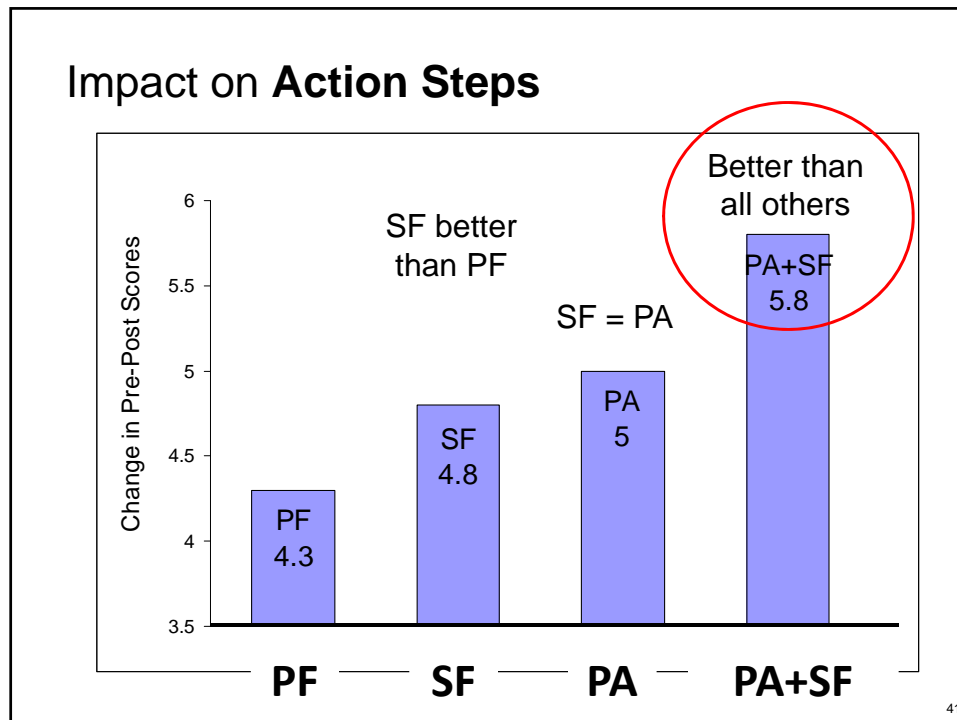
Key learning points and "tools"

1. SF goal-focused coaching "works" ✔
2. Self-insight is a key factor in positive change ✔
3. SF approaches *are* more effective than PF ✔
4. Positive Affect is an important coaching "tool" ✔
5. But feeling good is not enough
6. Combined SF+PA is best ✔
   - More positive affect – less negative affect
   - Greater self-efficacy
   - More action steps
   - Greater goal approach

- Awareness of research allows practitioners to develop a truly evidence-based approach to coachi ✔

SOLUTION

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Increasing the evidence-base for solution-focused coaching

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Abstract

- This session presents an overview of 20 years of solution-focused coaching research at the University of Sydney's Coaching Psychology Unit, with particular emphasis on outcomes, insights and evidence-based tools for practitioners. The session starts by outlining the concepts underpinning the Solution-focused Thinking Inventory (SFI) - a simple and validated measurement tool that can be freely used by practitioners to measure changes in client's thinking styles. I then present a series of studies that explore the differential effects of problem-focused coaching questions, solution-focused coaching questions, and positive affect induction - with some surprising findings that have important implications for practitioners. Finally, I then present a summary of our research into the impact of solution-focused cognitive-behavioural coaching on a range of outcome variables including goal attainment, insight, well-being and resilience, as well as some evidence-based reflections on the nature of the coach-coachee relationship. Overall this session will provide practitioners who wish to work in an evidence-based fashion, tools, models and process by which to benchmark their work and insights through which they can further develop their personal approach to solution-focused coaching.

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