My next client

Understanding the Big Five and positive personality dispositions of those seeking psychosocial support interventions

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My next client: Understanding the Big Five and positive personality dispositions of those seeking psychosocial support interventions.

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There is increasing interest in coaching and mentoring around the world as evidenced by journals such as the *International Coaching Psychology Review* itself, the *International Journal of Evidence-based Coaching and Mentoring,* the *International Journal of Coaching in Organisations,* and more recently in 2008, the new *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice,* various handbooks related to coaching (e.g., the *Evidence-based Coaching Handbook, 2006)* and by special issues devoted by journals to coaching (e.g., as in the recent *Australian Psychologist* issue, which included articles by Seligman, 2007, on coaching and positive psychology; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007 and Spence 2007, on evidence-based coaching; Latham, 2007 on theory and research on coaching practice; and MacKie, 2007 on evaluating effectiveness in executive coaching). There appears to be very little written on the qualities of those who seek coaching (an example of a psychosocial support intervention) or on how individual personality traits might be understood to enhance the coaching process. Hicks and Klockner (2007) reported some initial findings for intervention seekers, showing that attributes such as openness to experience, a goal-setting orientation and positive outlook ('hope') differentiated those who sought support, help and guidance from those who did not. This paper examines further the personal qualities and dispositions of those who seek such interventions. It is hoped that the findings will help coaches and mentors in shedding new light on understanding new clients from their own perspective.

Psychosocial support interventions are related directly to psychosocial support functions. These functions have been defined as acceptance, coaching, counselling and role modeling (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003). Psychosocial support interventions include

life coaching, career coaching, executive coaching, mentoring services and counselling including career counselling, psychology services and counselling in general. The interventions are aimed at meeting social support or life-goal needs of individuals.

There has been for a decade or more dramatic growth in coaching including life coaching as a valid psychosocial intervention for those seeking personal growth (Diedrich & Killburg, 2001; Grant, 2003; Killon, 2002). As Killon indicated life coaching helps clients determine their goals and find ways to achieve those goals. The spin-offs appear to more fulfilling lives and more effective relationships (Killon, 2002). Recent research shows that professional coaches are able to facilitate higher achievements from their clients via increased engagement in the process, and greater goal commitment and progression while at the same time building a greater sense of well-being (e.g., Spence & Grant, 2007a).

There are many reasons why people seek out these services or interventions including help with career and family matters, self improvement and understanding, achievement of personal and career goals, and expansion of knowledge and social contacts within an organisation. *But what drives such intervention-seeking behaviours?* How are intervention seekers different from those who display less interest in seeking social support for development? The underlying fact is that intervention seekers actively move into and participate in support interventions rather than avoiding the experience. An understanding of those aspects of personality that contribute to intervention seeking behaviour may help answer the question: *what is the relationship between personal characteristics (as drivers or motives) and the seeking of such psychosocial interventions*? A better understanding of how relevant personal attributes

influence intervention-seeking and participating behaviours would be a help for coaches in many areas of their service delivery such as marketing and client engagement.. Indeed coaching psychologists have been advised to finely attune both their diagnostic and their engagement skills to ensure the appropriateness of the coaching process (Grant & Cavanagh (2007b). This article reports a project examining selected attitudinal and personality variables that were thought likely to discriminate between intervention seekers and non-intervention seekers; it discusses personality contributions first.

Personality appears to have a robust effect on many domains of peoples' lives and on the outcomes in those lives including career success, career exploration development and more specifically an orientation to seeking career support (Blustein, 1988; Blustein & Phillips, 1988; Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999). Selected personality traits may identify those individuals who willingly seek out interventions such as coaching and counselling and thus contribute to the success of their career development programs and indirectly to the success of the organisation. In the organisational setting this information could assist in identifying those employees who seek out these interventions of their own accord and perhaps those who would not seek out career help interventions of their own accord. Organisations that understand that individuals may need extra encouragement to engage in a coaching or mentoring relationship can better service their staff development by examining this aspect among their personnel.

There would be little debate that corporate coaching and mentoring programs require a significant allocation of resources in both time and money. Before allocating resources towards coaching and mentoring organisations may wish to identify those individuals more likely to succeed in such programs through identifying attributes such

as self motivation, and therefore be provided with some comfort level in their decision making process. As with any other function, the competencies of candidates for organisational interventions should be identified, their strengths highlighted and gaps recognised so that tailored development plans can be implemented for those truly motivated to be prime movers in their own growth (Frisch, 2001). If we can identify relevant influencing personality attributes, then we can, according to Lee, Sheldon and Turner (2003), predict the motivational strategies that people will use. The call has gone out for organisations to focus on preparing their executives to be better equipped to maximise their potential to be coached (Wycherley & Cox, 2008). Similarly coaches can be better equipped for the coaching process by having knowledge around the personality and related attributes of the clients with whom they are working.

Early studies on orientation toward help-seeking and personality development generally focused more on attitudinal and situational factors rather than on personality factors. For example, Tijhuis, Peters and Foets (1990) found that willingness to be open about mental health problems and willingness to disclose mental health status were linked to willingness to seek help. Demographic, network and personality variables have been cited in other studies as predictors of whether individuals will seek help for emotional problems (Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994; Tijhuis, Peters & Foets, 1990). In particular, Rickwood and Braithwaite (1994) confirmed the importance of openness but also indicated that private self-consciousness or tendency to think about oneself and monitor one's internal thoughts and feelings played a role in help seeking motivation.

More recently, using a "Positive Psychology" paradigm, Lopez, Snyder and Pedrotti (2003) suggested that positive personality characteristics can be identified and

that these would form the basis for strength oriented training and interventions (including coaching and counselling). This is in line with the earlier assertions of Hicks and Paterson (1997) who argued that the challenge in training and development was to build on identified strengths to sustain efforts towards change, rather than to tackle the often frustrating prospect of addressing weaknesses. Seligman (2007) has continued to indicate the links between coaching and positive psychology. *But what are these positive personality or personal characteristics?* It would seem that high scores on openness and low scores on neuroticism (among the Big Five Factors (McCrae & Costa, 1992)) would contribute to help-seeking and growth behaviour. But what other aspects might be involved? Studies that follow report some of the research available, listing goal-setting orientation, personal initiative and positive outlook on life (hope) among the characteristics.

Roberts, O'Donnell and Robins (2004) confirmed that the development of individuals over time was in part determined by personality characteristics such as goal-setting and Judge and Illies (2002) identified goal-orientation as important. Other personality factors that influence motivation to seek out support and development services have been identified as personal growth initiative (Robitschek, 1999), self confidence and self efficacy (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Zweig & Webster, 2000), and a positive outlook (hope) (Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2002; Lopez, Snyder & Pedrotti, 2003; Snyder, et al., 1991).

There have been relatively few studies examining how the Big Five personality factors (McCrae & Costa, 1992) of Neuroticism, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Agreeableness are related to help-seeking

behaviour for personal growth, yet there is an emerging model that personality traits channel the motivation to engage in particular types of activities and influence the success of these activities (Bozionelos, 2004; Hollenbeck & Brief, 1987; Judge & Ilies, 2002; Kanfer, Wanberg & Kantrowitz, 2001).

This paper sought therefore to examine the Big Five attributes along with other identified attributes (goal-orientation, personal growth initiative, hope) as predictors of those who had and those who had not sought psychosocial inventions to help them in personal or career development.

Psychosocial interventions have in common an anticipation that participants will learn and grow from the experience. Whilst personal growth will be achieved, the level of this growth will be dependent upon the individual's propensity to engage in the process as a whole. Various counselling modalities have long recognised that the active participation of clients in the problem-management process leads to an increase in their learning and to an increase in the management of their lives (Egan, 2002). Those individuals with *a disposition towards personal growth* could be seen to be more accepting of the challenges that a psychosocial intervention like coaching demands from them.

Sheldon and Kasser (2001) found that people are able to improve their level of well-being and adjustment continually, through ongoing self-appropriate goal pursuit and growth. Research by Robitschek (1999) indicated that higher levels of psychological well-being were related to higher levels of *personal growth initiative*. The success of personal growth interventions in the form of any of the psychosocial modalities (counselling, mentoring, coaching etc) is relatively dependent on the level of

personal growth desired (related to personal growth initiative), positive expected outcomes (hope), goal seeking orientation and the dispositional goal directed traits that a person possesses.

This study was predominately interested in the personality profiles of psychosocial intervention seekers. To measure personality a number personality traits including the Big Five - Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 1992)- as well as general dispositions towards goal setting and growth, were of interest. An expanded rationale for the use of these constructs is given below to enable the reader to perceive their value in identifying and understanding what motivates and drives their own clients.

Selected "Big Five" Personality Dispositions

Lee, Sheldon and Turban (2003) among many others, have found that personality characteristics influence performance and enjoyment of work; information which is of direct relevance to coaches and counsellors in the work setting.

The current predominant personality model is known as the Big Five model, composed of the factors of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 1992). These factors were examined in the current study in relation to qualities of those who seek interventions.

Openness to Experience

Openness to Experience is characterised by being imaginative, seeking variety, and being intellectual. Ryff (1989) has suggested that Openness to Experience is a key characteristic of the fully functioning person and that this individual is continually developing rather than remaining in a fixed state. It has been found that Openness to

Experience is related to the ability to learn as well as the motivation to learn (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Low levels of Openness to Experience are associated with a preference for familiarity, simplicity and closure with these individuals tending to be unadventurous, socially conforming and conventional (Zweig & Webster, 2004). These researchers found that Openness to Experience was positively related to learning goal orientations and negatively related to performance avoidance goal orientations.

McCrae (1996) argued that of the five basic dimensions of personality, Openness to Experience was the most relevant in understanding social and interpersonal phenomena. Openness to Experience combined with a middle-range location on Introversion-Extraversion has also been identified with wisdom. Empirical work also suggests that certain cognitive, personality and experiential factors including a commitment to personal growth are important correlates of wisdom (Staudinger, Maciel, Smith & Baltes, 1998).

Openness to Experience has been portrayed as the most controversial and least understood of the Big-Five traits (Judge, Bono, Ilies & Gerhardt, 2002). However, in looking at the motivation to experience new situations and achieve personal growth from learning experiences, the trait of Openness to Experience was thought by the current researchers to relate strongly to motivation to seek out psychosocial support interventions. "Openness to Experience is conceived of as a broad and general dimension that manifests itself in the vividness of fantasy, artistic sensitivity, depth of feeling, behavioural flexibility, intellectual curiosity, and unconventional attitudes, all assessed by the openness facets of the NEO Personality Inventory" (Kruglanski, 2004).

Neuroticism

Individuals described as having low levels of emotional stability (high neuroticism) tend to be defensive and guarded and to have negative views of themselves, preferring to avoid challenging tasks (Goldberg, 1990). Neuroticism has been identified as one of the "Big Two" personality factors described by Eysenck over 40 years ago (Barrick & Mount, 1991) and is associated with being anxious, depressed, angry, embarrassed, emotional, worried and insecure.

An extensive meta-analytic review of the relationship of personality to performance motivation (Judge & Illies, 2002) found that individuals who display high levels of motivation in goal setting theory also have high levels of motivation according to expectancy and self-efficacy theories. These researchers found significant strong correlations between performance motivation and Neuroticism (negatively related equating to emotional stability), Conscientiousness and Extraversion with weaker correlations with Openness to Experience and Agreeableness. .

In looking at the role of approach and avoidance motivation in models of personality Elliot and Thrash (2002) found that an approach temperament (a positive motivational approach to goal attainment) and avoidance temperament (a negative motivational approach to goal attainment) can be linked to measures of Extroversion and positive emotionality (reversed Neuroticism).

Having a disposition which is insecure, negative and anxious, has been suggested by Lee, Sheldon and Turban (2003) as influencing goal striving processes; doing this by lowering goals, disrupting concentration on work tasks and instigating a failure orientation.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness involves being self-disciplined, hardworking and achievement-oriented (Zweig & Webster, 2004). This disposition is highly valued in workplace settings being linked with performance (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000), but not with high level career success as individuals concentrate on the task at hand rather than emphasising time to network that would help achieve the social status needed for appointments to top levels in organisations (Bozionelos, 2004). In terms of relevance to the current research, conscientiousness was considered to be related to one's commitment to change and growth. Conscientiousness was therefore included among the variables considered to identify those who seek interventions.

Extraversion

The trait of extraversion, being sociable, gregarious, assertive, active and talkative (Barrick & Mount, 1991), has been suggested as being associated with success in mentoring and networking situations. Individuals possessing a high level of extraversion are predisposed to have both positive affect and cognitions (Zweig & Webster, 2004) and are optimistic about the future (Eysenck, 1981). Research has indicated that extraversion is positively related to learning goal orientations and negatively related to performance avoidance orientation (Zweig & Webster, 2004). Extraversion has been positively correlated with a learning orientation (Lawson, 1999; Chan & Tesluk, 2000; Elliot & Thrash 2002) and low levels of extraversion are associated with a decrease in interest, activity and stimulation (Clarke & Watson, 1991). However, organisational extrinsic career success has not been associated with extraversion (Bozionelos, 2004).

Agreeableness

Bonzionelos (2004) indicates that agreeableness is associated with tendencies to care for others, being good natured and possessing modesty and trust; people with these qualities often sacrifice their own career and personal success-- so that agreeableness is not associated with such career success. General findings on agreeableness are mixed with emphasis on teamwork and good relationships and suggestions of positive correlation with personal-oriented careers. It is possible that agreeableness may be a factor in those motivated to seek psychosocial interventions and change but it is more likely that agreeableness is an independent factor. This study examines all of the Big Five factors including agreeableness, to clarify this issue.

Other factors, as discussed next, were also studied in the project.

Personal Growth Initiative

Individual differences exist in peoples' proclivity to take action to influence their personal growth. Robitschek and Cook (1999) found that people with high levels of personal growth initiative were not only aware of their development over time, but were also proactive about the change process, intentionally seeking out opportunities for personal development. Identification of those high in Personal Growth Initiative will also identify those willing to participate in change programs and interventions involving growth and learning.

Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) is defined as "active, intentional engagement in the process of personal growth" (Robitscheck, 1998, p.184) with the emphasis on intentional self-change in any life domain.

Findings indicated that people scoring high on the PGI questionnaire (and the

associated trait) had greater awareness of the outcomes from intentional growth

planning than did those whose growth was "unintentional" or unplanned. Robitschek

(1998) also suggested that higher levels of PGI could be achieved through training (or

coaching) of clients so that the clients could use PGI strategies through their life span.

Studies into career exploration by Blustein (1989) suggest that highly goal-

directed individuals engage in exploratory activities that foster the attainment of those

goals. In looking at effective patterns in achievement situations Elliot and Dweck

(1988) have identified that both performance goals and learning goals each run off a

different "program" with different cognitive commands, decision rules and inference

rules. In a learning goal orientation an individual's perceived level of skill becomes

irrelevant and the individual will seek to increase competence, opting for challenging

tasks and will seek to learn new skills, even if errors were public.

The Disposition of Hope

In discussing personality traits for personal growth it is also desirable to look at

the emotion of 'Hope'; hope and goal-directed thinking are associated in that people

perceive that they can produce routes to desired goals and have the requisite motivation

to use those routes. Participation in a life coaching program has been shown to deliver

significant increase in hope, well-being and goal striving (Green, Oades & Grant, 2006),

hope has also been found to be associated with improved emotional and behavioural

coping in different life domains and to be associated with constructive thinking and

resource allocation (Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2002).

Hope is defined as "a cognitive set that is based on reciprocally derived sense of

successful (a) *agency* (goal directed determination), and (d) *pathways* (planning of ways

to attain goals)" (Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Holleran, Irving, et al., 1991, p. 571).

Recently there has been empirical support for the distinctive functions of the agency and

pathways facets (Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2002). These researchers see agentic

thinking being activated across situations initially to propel people along their imagined

routes to goals, whereas the pathways thinking is concerned more with initiating know-

how strategies to deal with specific impediments which may arise.

Depending on their trait hope levels, people should bring these hope emotion

sets to their goal-related activities (Lopez, Snyder & Pedrotti, 2003). These researchers

assert that Hope provides emotional feedback directing the pursuit of goals. Thus hope

involves thoughts or beliefs that sustain individuals in their movement towards goals.

The Adult Dispositional Hope Scale was included in this research to measure the

degree to which trait hope is included in the pursuit of goal directed behaviour. Scores

on the Adult Dispositional Hope Scale have been shown to increase the prediction of an

individual's goal-related activities and coping strategies beyond other self-reporting

measures (Snyder, et al., 1991). That is, people measuring higher on the hope scale tend

to have enhanced goal-directed agency and sense of pathways to goals than those

scoring lower.

Individuals undertaking goal directed behaviour in the coaching, mentoring or

counselling interventions will bring with them a trait disposition of hope, positive or

negative; an understanding of the level of hope which the individual brings to the

intervention may be of benefit to the parties involved.

Disposition towards Goal setting

Researchers have found that setting goals is important in many endeavours and

Bandura (1986) in explaining social learning theory has described the tendency to set goals and make plans as part of effective human functioning. Whilst goal setting has been mainly recognised in the sports and business domains its value in helping clients overcome serious psychological disorders has also been well documented historically (Bernard, 1985; Frank, 1973). Students with low goal-orientation scores tended to score higher on depression, hopelessness and maladjustment and students who undertook an intervention to help raise their Grade Point Averages (GPA) through enhancing goal orientation were successful in achieving higher GPAs (Malouff et al., 1990).

Goal setting theory is based on the observation that conscious human behaviour is regulated by an individual's internalized self set goals and the degree of self motivation they expend in purposefully working towards these goals (Latham & Locke, 1991). Individuals high in goal setting will therefore set themselves goals which they actively strive to achieve. In the workplace, it has been found that setting specific and difficult goals produces greater effort toward goal achievement (Williams, Karau & Bourgeois, 1993) and better performance (Locke, Shaw, Saari & Latham, 1981). Such commitment to goals is also related to self-esteem and to social status among co-workers (Pilegge & Holtz, 1997).

Hollenbeck and Brief's (1987) work on the effects of individual differences and goal origin on goal setting and performance found that individuals who self-set goals, regardless of trait differences, exhibited more motivation to pursue their goals than subjects who were assigned goals. There was also less variation in expectancy and valence of goal attainment for subjects who set their own goals. This implies that those who set themselves goals and move toward their goal attainment are more motivated.

Summary and Hypotheses

In more specific terms, the purpose of this study was to examine whether the Big Five personality factors and the factors of goal-orientation, personal growth initiative and hope disposition could discriminate between individuals who had and those who had not sought psychosocial interventions including coaching; i.e. those with stronger commitment to interventions and growth could be identified by stronger scores on scales of personal attributes as measured by Personal Growth Initiative, Goal Setting and Adult Dispositional Hope and by certain of the Big Five Factors.

It was hypothesised that "Individuals who seek out psychosocial support interventions will be higher on Personal Growth Initiative, Dispositional Hope, Goal Setting orientation, Openness to Experience, Extraversion and Conscientiousness and lower in Neuroticism (therefore be more emotionally stable), and Agreeableness than those who do not seek out psychosocial support interventions".

The dependent variable for this study was whether or not an individual had sought out and attended a psychosocial intervention (had sought out one or more of a variety of personal activities such as requested counselling appointments, developed a relationship with a mentor, sought coaching or personal advice, sought career counselling or sought other help that would "intervene" in their lives and help improve or strengthen their development in some way).

Because the emphasis in the study was on the ability of these chosen facets to discriminate between intervention seekers as a group and non-intervention seekers as a group, and to see how well the variables did this, discriminant function analysis was deemed an appropriate strategy to use. Discriminant analysis is the mirror image of

MANOVA and its basic purpose is to estimate the relationship between a single non-metric (categorical) dependent variable and a set of metric independent variables. It is used for prediction of group membership where each object can be predicted or explained by a set of independent variables (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1984).

Method

Participants

The 200 participants in this study came from convenience sampling and included 110 from the general population of the Gold Coast, and 90 from the general population of Victoria. There were 62 males and 138 females, with ages ranging from 18 to 79 years, and a mean age of 44.4 years (SD = 12.7). A good cross-section of participants was obtained with the majority being in active paid employment in white collar industries. This individual study concentrating on personality profiling of intervention seekers was part of a larger group study examining personality in the workplace. All participants completed a package of questionnaires including the NEO-PI-R, the Apollo Profile (including a Goal-setting category), the Adult Dispositional Hope Scale, the Personal Growth Initiative Scale and a bio-data questionnaire in which the participants indicated whether they had sought help from others (interventions) and what kind of help this was. Gender, age, experience and other demographic variables were also requested.

Assessment Tools

The *Revised NEO Personality Inventory* (NEO-PI-R) (Costa & McRae, 1992) containing 240 items was administered to assess the five personality dimensions of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and

Conscientiousness. The internal consistency and test-retest reliability coefficients from previous research on the NEO-PI-R are reported as ranging from about .85 to .95 for the Big Five factors.

The Personal Growth Initiative Scale (Robitschek, 1998) was administered to assess Personal Growth Initiative. Nine-items are each rated on a six-point Likert scale from 1 (definitely disagree) to 6 (definitely agree). An example item is "*If I want to change something in my life, I initiate the transaction process*". Robitschek (1998, 1999) reported internal consistency coefficients ranging from .78 to .88 and a test-retest reliability of .74 over eight weeks. Cronbach's Alpha was .89 in the current study, consistent with Robitscheck's findings.

The Adult Dispositional Hope (Goal) Scale (Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Holleran, Irving, et al., 1991) is a self report, 12 item inventory which assesses both how people perceive that they can produce routes to desired goals (pathway thinking) and the requisite motivation to use those routes (agency thinking). Four items each assess pathways and agency elements and four items are filler items, each using a 4-point Likert-type scale. Example items are "I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me" and "Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem". The scale is internally reliable (alphas of .74 to .88) and temporally stable (test-retests over several weeks of .85). Alpha coefficients in the present study were .79 for the overall Hope Scale, .73 for the agency component, and .68 for pathways component, reasonably consistent with the previous studies.

The Goal Setting Scale of the Apollo Profile (1996) was utilized as a measure of goal setting orientation for this current study. Goal setting is measured by 8 items. The

goal setting facet in the Apollo is primarily measuring a work commitment-conscientiousness factor and is positively related to achievement, conscientiousness, persistence, detail-consciousness, self-organisation, proactivity and loyalty. Alpha reliabilities in the present study were .64 for goal setting, reasonably consistent with the previous studies of .69 for a sample of 4070 respondents (Hicks, 2005).

Respondents rated their answers on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 meaning of very little importance to them, to 7 meaning of high importance to them. Sample questions for goal setting in the Apollo include "Having clear aims and set goals" and "Have good detailed goals".

Results

Table 1 shows the inter-correlations among the eight variables across the full sample of 200 adults. A number of interesting relationships are demonstrated between the variables with perhaps the most significant (above .30) being *among the Big Five* those between openness and extraversion (.38) and neuroticism and conscientiousness (-.50); *between the Big Five and the other three attributes* those between extraversion and hope (.38), conscientiousness and both personal growth initiative (.35) and hope (.33) and neuroticism and the same two variables of PGI (-.38) and hope (-.36). Finally, *among the other attributes* PGI was identified as strongly correlated with dispositional hope (.69) and with goal setting (.32). The importance of these relationships is taken into account in the subsequent discriminant analyses used to assess the data including the difference between 'intervention seekers' and 'non-intervention seekers'.

TABLE 1 about here

Of the 200 people sampled 116 reported that they had sought at least once personal development help or support via life coaching, career counselling, personal counselling, executive coaching, mentoring or psychological counselling. Of the 116, 66 had been involved in at least two different kinds of the six listed interventions (life coaching etc), and 34 had been involved in three or more of the six types of intervention. The mean age for the intervention group was marginally lower than the non intervention group and there were slightly more females than males proportionately among those who had sought interventions. This study reports the main differences found between those who had sought interventions (116) and those who had not (84).

Firstly a Discriminant Analysis was performed with did/did not seek psychosocial support (intervention) as the DV and the Big Five factors (openness to experience, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness and agreeableness) as predictor variables. As there were only the two categories (did seek psychosocial support or did not seek psychosocial support) only a single discriminant function was calculated (see Table 2). A total of 200 individuals were analysed. The value of this function was significantly different for the did seek support group than the did not seeking support group (chi-square = 30.286, df = 5, p<0.0005).

Table 2 about here

The structure matrix as shown in Table 2 gives a measure of the contribution that each of the Big Five factors made to the discriminant function. The order of magnitude indicated that openness to experience and extraversion were the best predictors of seeking psychosocial support, followed by neuroticism (negative value), conscientiousness and agreeableness respectively.

Overall the discriminant function successfully predicted outcomes for 69% of cases, with accurate predictions being made for 69% of the intervention seeking group and with accurate predictions being made for 69% of the non intervention seeking group (See Table 3).

Table 3 about here

A second discriminant analysis was also performed with did/did not seek psychosocial support as the DV and the Big Five factors (openness to experience, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness and agreeableness) plus Adult Dispositional Hope, Personal Growth Initiative, Goal Setting as predictor variables. Again as there were only the two categories (did seek psychosocial support or did not seek psychosocial support) only a single discriminant function was calculated. Again a total of 200 individuals were analysed. The value of this function was again significantly different for the seeking support group and non seeking support group (chi-square = 34.788, df = 8, p<0.0005).

The structure matrix as shown in Table 4 gives a measure of the contribution that each of eight variables made to the discriminant function. The order of magnitude indicated that again openness to experience and extraversion were the best predictors of seeking psychosocial support, followed by Adult Dispositional Hope, Personal Growth Initiative, Goal Setting, neuroticism (negative value), conscientiousness and agreeableness respectively.

Tables 4 and 5 about here

Overall the discriminant function (Table 5) successfully predicted outcomes for 71% of cases, with accurate predictions being made for 74.1% of the intervention seeking group and with accurate predictions being made for 66.7% of the non intervention seeking group.

Discussion

This study examined the direct relationship of individual choice in seeking or not seeking psychosocial interventions to three personal characteristics (Personal Growth Initiative, Adult Dispositional Hope and Goal Setting) and the Big Five personality factors (Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness). Findings showed that there was a significant relationship between five of the eight variables (Openness to Experience, Extraversion, Adult Dispositional Hope, Personal Growth Initiative and Goal Setting) and the prediction of intervention seeking.

These variables could be seen as describing individual predispositions to set goals, value experience, and actively and positively seek personal growth in achieving the set goals. Participants in or who seek interventions of their own free will could be described as highly motivated and energetic. They are actively involved in their own destiny with the intervention process representing a chance for them to focus on their self growth.

The results in general supported the hypothesis, with intervention seekers scoring higher in Openness, Extraversion, Personal Growth Initiative, Adult Dispositional Hope and Goal Setting than those who do not seek out psychosocial interventions (though not significantly different in Conscientiousness, Neuroticism or Agreeableness).

Coaching and mentoring interventions for these individuals would be highly welcome and even necessary for their self satisfaction. Within the work environment these individuals will actively seek out opportunities to be coached or mentored for career development. Development for them is seen as recognition that they are growing and may satisfy their internal need for continuous learning. These individuals may be seen to be directors of their own destiny, being optimistic and able to surmount barriers and find alternative routes to achieve their goals. Interventions for these people represent an opportunity to obtain feedback on progress towards goals and change behaviours or thinking patterns to correct the path to the desired goals.

Of the eight independent variables Openness to Experience was identified as being the best predictor of intervention seeking. Individuals high in Openness to Experience appear to be willing to take on new challenges and are open to a variety of

experiences to enrich their learning. These individuals are curious, willing to seek out new and even unconventional ideas to ensure their lives are experientially rich (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Within organisational settings these individuals may be the first to volunteer for new assignments, work at various locations and generally be mobile in both tasks and environments throughout the organisation. In private coaching and counselling domains these individuals will seek out help from others and do not fear experiencing both positive and negative emotions as part of a new endeavour. These individuals will enjoy the intervention experience as a stimulus to their open minded thinking and varied interests.

The implications of this research for counsellors and individual coaches is that they now have tools (the concepts and/or questionnaires used) by which to identify and recognise those clients who might represent the coaching 'cream of the crop', that is, those people who will most readily work towards self improvement and growth. These individuals/clients will be highly receptive in working towards goal attainment and they may actually seek out interventions as confirmation that they can achieve their already self set goals.

This research suggests that awareness of specified personal traits (especially the ones identified here) can help counsellors, coaches and practitioners to understand and predict strategies their clients will employ in a given achievement setting. That is, it seems that global personality differences in self-determination preferences and strategies can predict situation-specific goal striving processes as found by Lee, Sheldon and Turban (2003).

For the coach, identifying open and goal orientated clients should enable the setting of relevant, difficult and challenging assignments that will be felt by the clients as gratifying.

Clients with high scores on Openness, Extraversion, Growth Initiative, Goal Orientation and Hope, will need to feel that they are actively moving forward in their personal growth and coaches might be able to identify causes of frustration in some of their clients as being related to their strong valuing of these factors. These clients may need suitable feedback along the way as to growth, change and development of self-concept. Combined with high Openness to Experience and low Neuroticism these individuals can be given tasks which may be less appropriate for other clients. These clients give coaches an opportunity to witness the best of human spirit and striving. Assessing the relevant characteristics during the process of counselling and coaching may therefore assist in that process.

Overall the findings verify that psychosocial intervention seekers actively work towards a greater self-understanding and improved personal skills: they actively seek out help in both problem solving and self development programs. These individuals are open, emotionally stable, interact easily, and proactively work towards personal growth. They also possess the emotion of Hope which associated with goal-directed and strategic thinking (Lopez, Snyder & Pedrotti, 2003)

The most useful scales from a practitioner's standpoint for predicting personal interest in development programs are those associated with openness, extraversion, dispositional hope, personal growth and goal setting. Kilburg (2001) underlined the value of assessing the client's level of motivation and commitment to progressive

development, if clients were to be helped to adhere to development programs.

Organisations and individual practitioners working within intervention settings now have a two edged sword, having both a better understanding of the individuals likely to actively want to participate in coaching interventions but just as importantly an understanding of individuals who would not necessarily seek out or participate in these interventions. Programs can be further tailored to suit both types of individuals for maximum outcomes for both parties. Supporting this idea Kilburg (1997) postulated that the growth of the client and the success of the intervention (coaching) would be concrete indicators that the consultant had selected the right strategies.

One other outcome from the current study can be seen in regard to Goal-setting. Collecting data on a client's goal setting orientation may be of direct value in psychosocial interventions. While emphasis has been given in the discussion above to those who have disposition towards seeking self- and other-help interventions, of course individuals will present with varying degrees of such dispositional characteristics. Coaches could use responses on individual items for those who do not fall in the clearly highly motivated groups, as lead-ins to coaching around goal setting and planning (cf., Malouff et al.,1990). If a client indicates that setting goals is a waste of time, the coach may want to explore that view with the client.

There were several potential limitations of the study. First, all of the measures used were self-report and as such were limited by the reliability of that method and subject to error (Blustein, 1989)*.* This study also asked only about whether participants had been involved in psychosocial interventions, not whether the programs had been successful in helping achieve goals. Future research on the *effectiveness* of coaching

could also examine the relationship between these personality factors and measurements of actual *success* and perceptions of *satisfaction* with the coaching, thus building on the current study which has demonstrated that there are factors associated with those who actively seek out coaching. For example, individuals high in Personal Growth Initiative, Adult Dispositional Hope and Goal Setting may require coaches to set more difficult goal task orientations for self satisfaction in the coaching process.

The current sample was predominantly Caucasian working adults; different cultural groups may emphasise different characteristics; further study in different cultural groups will need to be conducted.

Our study has indicated, for the sample studied, that personal and personality characteristics of those who actively seek development and support interventions, include in particular openness, extraversion, positive hope, the valuing of personal growth (leading to personal growth initiative), and goal setting. These traits seem particularly relevant for understanding an individual's motivation and likely ultimate success in coaching and counselling processes. A key challenge facing coaches and counsellors is to understand how personality and motivational differences can affect the setting of goals and the processes for achieving those goals. The results of this study contribute a little towards meeting this key challenge.

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Table 1 *Inter-correlation table: the Big Five factors, Personal Growth Initiative, Hope and Goal-setting (for N = 200)*

Independent Variables	OE	C	E	A	N	PGI	ADH	GS
Openness to Experience (OE)	1.00							
Conscientiousness (C)	-.10	1.00						
Extraversion (E)	.38 ***	.19 **	1.00					
Agreeableness (A)	.09	.19 **	.10	1.00				
Neuroticism (N)	.03	-.50 ***	-.28 ***	-.24 ***	1.00			
Personal Growth Initiative (PGI)	.15 *	.35 ***	.28 ***	.00	-.38 ***	1.00		
Adult Dispositional Hope (ADH)	.28 ***	.33 ***	.38 ***	-.04	-.36 ***	.69 ***	1.00	
Goal Setting (GS)	.05	.21 **	.15 *	.01	-.08	.32 ***	.23 **	1.00

Table 2

Structure Matrix – The Big Five- One Discriminant Function Revealed

Independent Variables	Function 1
Openness to Experience	.833
Extraversion	.766
Neuroticism	-.198
Conscientiousness	.091
Agreeableness	.035

Table 3

Classification Results for Prediction of Group Membership- The Big Five

Intervention			Predicted Group Membership		
			Yes	No	Total
Original	Count	Yes	80	36	116
		No	26	58	84
Prediction	%	Yes	69.0	31.0	100
		No	31.0	69.0	100

a. 69.0% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

Table 4

Structure Matrix – The Big Five, Hope, Goal-setting and Personal Growth Initiative-One Discriminant Function Revealed

Independent Variables	Function 1
Openness to Experience	.769
Extraversion	.708
Adult Dispositional Hope	.571
Personal Growth Initiative	.509
Goal Setting	.325
Neuroticism	-.183
Conscientiousness	.084
Agreeableness	.032

Table 5

Classification Results for Prediction of Group Membership- The Big Five + Adult Dispositional Hope, Personal Growth Initiative and Goal Setting.

Intervention			Predicted Group Membership		
			Yes	No	Total
Original	Count	Yes	86	30	116
		No	28	56	84
Prediction	%	Yes	74.1	25.9	100
		No	33.3	66.7	100

a. 71.0% of original grouped cases correctly classified.