

**Thesis of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation**

**Empirical, Longitudinal Study on the Effectiveness  
of Solution-Focused Brief Coaching Psychological  
Interventions in a Workplace Context**

Réka Gerhát

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ákos Münnich



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

Doctoral School of Humanities

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## I. DELINEATION OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC

According to Bagdy (2009), the defining features of recent decades include *"the proliferation of helping professions, the fragmentation of service domains, increasing tensions from overlapping competencies, and a methodological 'psycho-boom' – the rampant expansion of helping methods"* (p. 55). In recent decades, coaching has gained increasing global popularity and is perceived as a more socially acceptable form of support than traditional psychological interventions (Cavanagh & Buckley, 2014). Within human resources, it is considered one of the fastest-growing interventions (Bozer & Delegach, 2019).

Data from the International Coaching Federation (ICF, 2020) indicate that approximately 71,000 coaches were active worldwide in 2019, representing a 33% increase over four years. These developments highlight the growing need for evidence-based theories, models, and scientifically rigorous studies examining coaching effectiveness.

Grant (2006) observed an exponential increase in empirical studies and literature reviews on psychological coaching interventions between 1995 and 2005. Numerous high-quality studies (e.g., Grant, 2013; Ladegård & Gjerde, 2014), meta-analyses (e.g., Cannon-Bowers et al., 2023; Graßmann, Schölmerich, & Schermuly, 2020; Sonesh et al., 2015; Theeboom, Beersma, & van Vianen, 2014; Wang, Lai, Xu, & McDowall, 2022), and systematic reviews (e.g., Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Lai & McDowall, 2014) have been published. However, practical applications still outpace the empirical and theoretical foundations that would validate its effectiveness (Fillery-Travis & Corrie, 2018; Grover & Furnham, 2016).

Globally, organisations invest over two billion USD annually in workplace coaching (ICF, 2020), which has heightened the demand for empirical data substantiating its organisational effectiveness. Grover & Furnham (2016) emphasize the need for more high-quality, randomised controlled studies.

In Hungary, research into the psychological impact of coaching remains scarce, especially in relation to solution-focused brief coaching (SFBC; O'Connell & Palmer, 2018). This approach, rooted in the work of the Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Center (de Shazer et al., 1986), places emphasis on goal orientation, resource activation, and step-by-step progress.

## II. AIM OF THE DISSERTATION

According to Passmore & Fillery-Travis (2011), the development of a new scientific field typically follows four evolutionary stages: (1) theoretical exploration, (2) case studies and small-scale empirical research, (3) large-scale quantitative studies with randomised control groups, and (4) investigation of factors influencing effectiveness through mediators and moderators. Based on Grover & Furnham (2016), coaching research currently lies at the intersection of the second and third stages; thus, there remains a pressing need for high-quality, randomised controlled studies.

Our review of the literature revealed that while many studies focus on the effectiveness of executive coaching, empirical studies investigating the impact of workplace coaching among non-managerial employees remain limited (Corbu et al., 2021). Moreover, both professional and practical considerations support the examination of the solution-focused brief approach. As a brief, strength-based, results-oriented, and present- and future-focused method, solution-focused coaching is particularly well-suited to the rapidly changing and unpredictable environments characteristic of modern organisations (Berg & Szabó, 2005; O'Connell & Palmer, 2018). Although solution-focused coaching may not be more effective than other coaching types (Wang et al., 2022), its capacity for delivering rapid outcomes has contributed to its rising popularity (Iveson, George & Ratner, 2017). According to Whybrow & Palmer (2018), among the four most popular approaches among both coaches and coaching psychologists.

Empirical evidence suggests that solution-focused approaches and coaching effectively reduce negative affectivity (Berg & Karlsen, 2013; Grant & O'Connor, 2010), increase positive affectivity (Grant, 2012; Green et al., 2007), enhance self-efficacy (Grant, 2012; Wehr, 2010), subjective well-being (Green, Oades & Grant, 2006; Spence & Grant, 2007), performance, and the likelihood of achieving personal goals (Spence & Grant, 2007; Theeboom et al., 2014).

In light of these insights, the primary aim of this longitudinal study is to empirically assess the effectiveness of individual solution-focused brief coaching (SFBC) psychological interventions in a business setting, targeting non-managerial employees. Our long-term objective is to strengthen the international credibility of solution-focused coaching interventions, thereby supporting individual development and contributing to socio-economic growth.

Within the framework of the randomised controlled trial, the effectiveness of workplace coaching was assessed through three 60-minute coaching sessions per participant, followed by a follow-up period of nearly five months. The target population comprised white-collar employees aged between 25 and 40.

The main research question was whether participation in a solution-focused coaching programme leads to reduced negative affectivity and enhanced positive affectivity, self-efficacy, well-being, performance, and successful goal attainment. The study also examined the relationships between the level of detail in action plans, prior engagement in self-awareness activities, specific personality traits of coachees, their subjective experiences of the coaching process, and the overall effectiveness of the intervention. To assess the outcomes of coaching psychological interventions from multiple perspectives and reduce the risk of bias (Theeboom et al., 2014), we employed a multi-method approach comprising self-report questionnaires, 360-degree performance evaluations, and semi-structured interviews.

### III. DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODS, PROCEDURE, AND SAMPLE

The research was conducted at a multinational information and communication technology (ICT) company in Hungary, where we examined the effectiveness of coaching psychological interventions among white-collar, non-managerial employees. Owing to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection was carried out under hybrid working conditions (a combination of office-based and remote work), while the coaching sessions were conducted in company-provided offices under conditions ensuring confidentiality. The professional facilitating the coaching process held an MA degree in psychology and had completed a three-module solution-focused brief coaching training programme.

Participants were recruited using non-probability, convenience sampling. During recruitment, we excluded senior managers, as well as those middle managers who had previously participated in coaching programmes delivered by the organisation's internal professionals. The study sample consisted of 84 mentally healthy adults. The average age of participants was 31 years ( $M=31$ ,  $SD=3.04$ ), with a balanced gender distribution (47 women, 37 men), and the majority held a university degree. In response to the question "*Have you previously participated in a self-awareness process?*", 29 participants answered in the affirmative.

In order to obtain more differentiated results and enhance internal validity, we designed a randomised controlled trial (RCT), comprising an Experimental Group (EG) and a Waitlist Control Group (WCG). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two groups and were informed that the overall process would take approximately 6–8 months, participation was voluntary, and all data would be handled confidentially and reported anonymously. This marked the commencement of the first phase of the study. The composition of the two groups is presented in *Table 1*.

*Table 1: Composition of the Experimental and Waitlist Control Groups*

	<b>Experimental Group (EG)</b>	<b>Waitlist Control Group (WCG)</b>
<b>Number, gender</b>	43 participants – 25 women, 18 men	41 participants – 22 women, 19 men
<b>Age</b>	M = 30.28; SD = 2.98; Min. = 25; Max. = 36	M = 31.27; SD = 3.06; Min. = 27; Max. = 40
<b>Education</b>	High School: 1 participant; BA degree: 25 participants; MA degree: 17 participants	High School: 1 participant; BA degree: 25 participants; MA degree: 15 participants

A mixed-methods approach was employed to evaluate coaching effectiveness from multiple perspectives and to minimise potential bias. For quantitative data collection, we used the following standardised questionnaires:

- The shortened 44-item version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; Hungarian adaptation by Rózsa, 2010);
- The Positive and Negative Affectivity Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988; Hungarian adaptation by Rózsa, 2009);
- The Schwarzer General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995, Hungarian adaptation by Kopp, Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995);
- The WHO Well-Being Index (WBI; Bech, Staehr-Johansen, & Gudex, 1996) is a 5-item scale (WBI-5; Staehr-Johansen, 1998), with the Hungarian version adapted by Susánszky, Konkoly Thege, Stauder, & Kopp (2006).

In addition, we developed a 360-degree performance evaluation questionnaire, which demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.72–0.94). This instrument assessed seven key competency areas: *decision-making, planning, adaptability, teamwork, problem-solving, communication, and conflict management*.

For qualitative analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted, focusing on participants' subjective experiences of the coaching process and the competencies of the coach.

During the initial (0th) session, demographic data were collected, personality traits were assessed, and the 360-degree performance evaluation was administered. To map competencies – in addition to self-assessment – two colleagues were selected for each participant: their direct line manager and a peer at the same hierarchical level. Except for members of the management team, all evaluators were drawn from among the study participants. Importantly, evaluators were not informed whether the individual they were assessing belonged to the EG or WCG, thereby eliminating bias related to group assignment.

Subsequently, all participants attended a two-person consultation session, which served as a brief orientation and an opportunity to establish rapport. For the EG, this session also included contract setting, goal formulation, and goal scaling based on the 360-degree performance evaluation. Afterwards, each participant completed a so-called *Baseline Assessment Questionnaire Package*. One or two days later, the first coaching session was held for the EG.

The first phase consisted of three 60-minute coaching sessions and pre-session assessments, while the WCG underwent a waitlist period, also with assessments. Sessions were held approximately every two-three weeks. The structure of the coaching sessions was based on the framework of solution-focused brief coaching (Iveson et al., 2017). The milestones of the first session included: (1) envisioning the desired future and moving away from the static present – the miracle question; (2) identifying positive signs and exceptions; (3) scaling, taking small steps forward, and resource gathering; (4) feedback and closure. The main objectives of the second and third sessions were to follow up on progress and support the coachee's advancement. The third session always concluded with the formulation of a concrete action plan and feedback.

In the second phase – during the 20 weeks following the last session – coaching effectiveness was assessed longitudinally, using a monthly *Baseline Assessment Questionnaire Package*. At the end of this period, participants in the EG were interviewed using a semi-structured format to evaluate their subjective experience of the coaching process, the coach, and goal attainment. For the entire sample, this phase concluded with a final 360-degree performance evaluation.

Members of the WCG were only granted access to the three-session coaching programme following the approximately six-month waiting period.

## IV. THESES OF THE RESULTS

### **1. Thesis: A three-session solution-focused brief coaching psychological intervention significantly enhances levels of positive affectivity, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being, while reducing negative affectivity among non-managerial employees.**

Based on the results of the randomised controlled trial, members of the Experimental Group (EG) reported significantly higher levels of positive affectivity, self-efficacy, and well-being by the end of the intervention and at follow-up, relative to their baseline scores. In contrast, no improvement—and in some cases, deterioration—was observed in the Waitlist Control Group (WCG). Negative affectivity also decreased in the EG.

The between-group differences at follow-up were not always statistically significant, which can partly be explained by higher baseline values in the WCG. Specifically, participants in the WCG initially gave themselves significantly higher self-assessment (SA) scores than those in the EG, a discrepancy not reflected in external 360-degree feedback from managers (MA) and peers (PA), suggesting the presence of psychological defence mechanisms (e.g., uncertainty management) during the waitlist period.

These results confirm that solution-focused brief coaching is an effective psychological intervention in workplace settings for supporting mental well-being. Related findings are detailed in *Chapters IV.1–3.* and *V.1–4.* of the doctoral dissertation and in the following publication:

Gerhát R., Ocsenás D., Münnich Á. (2025). Enhancing performance, self-efficacy and well-being: A randomised controlled study in solution-focused business coaching. *Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 23(1), 24–48. <https://doi.org/10.24384/7s2w-9g73>

### **2. Thesis: A three-session solution-focused brief coaching psychological intervention significantly improves work performance among non-managerial employees.**

According to the trial results, members of the EG achieved significantly higher performance scores by the end of the process and at follow-up relative to their own baseline. No significant change was observed in the WCG. The lack of significant between-group differences at follow-up may be attributed to higher initial SA scores in the WCG, which were not supported by MA and PA assessments.

These findings support the effectiveness of solution-focused brief coaching in enhancing workplace performance. Related results are presented in *Chapters IV.4.* and *V.5.* of the doctoral dissertation and in the following publication:

Gerhát R., Ocsenás D., Münnich Á. (2025). Enhancing performance, self-efficacy and well-being: A randomised controlled study in solution-focused business coaching. *Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 23(1), 24–48. <https://doi.org/10.24384/7s2w-9g73>

**3. Thesis: Clearly defined, personally meaningful goals and detailed action plans formulated during the coaching process increase the likelihood of improved performance and successful goal attainment, particularly in competencies measured by the 360-degree evaluation.**

Participants who articulated clear goals and developed detailed action plans at the outset of coaching demonstrated greater improvement in competencies such as decision-making, planning, communication, and conflict management. These participants also rated the coaching process as more successful. Statistical analyses confirmed that both goal clarity and plan detail significantly contributed to positive outcomes. These findings are elaborated in *Chapters IV.5–6.* and *V.7–8.* of the doctoral dissertation.

These results align with existing literature: solution-focused coaching effectively reduces negative affectivity and enhances positive affectivity (Green et al., 2007; Grant & O'Connor, 2010; Grant, Green et al., 2010; Grant, 2012), self-efficacy (Grant & O'Connor, 2010; Wehr, 2010; Grant, 2012), subjective well-being (Green et al., 2006; Grant, 2007; Spence & Grant, 2007; Grant et al., 2009), and performance, while also increasing the likelihood of goal achievement (Grant, 2012; Grant, 2013; Grant & O'Connor, 2010; Grant, Green et al., 2010; Theeboom et al., 2014; Grant & Gerrard, 2019).

**4. Thesis: Prior experience in self-awareness processes and specific personality traits (*conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness, extraversion, agreeableness*) significantly support the effectiveness of coaching, particularly in enhancing self-efficacy, performance, and goal attainment.**

The research revealed that participants with prior self-awareness experience and higher scores in the aforementioned personality dimensions showed significantly greater improvement across all measured psychological variables. This suggests that the effectiveness of coaching is

influenced not only by methodological frameworks but also by the individual characteristics of participants. Relevant findings are presented in *Chapters IV.7–8.* and *V.9–10.* of the doctoral dissertation and in the following publication:

Gerhát R., Ocsenás D., Münnich Á. (2025). The Impact of Personality Traits on the Effectiveness of Solution-Focused Coaching in a Workplace Context. *International Coaching Psychology Review*. Accepted for publication: 2025.

**5. Thesis: The level of collaboration between the coach and coachee, as well as the professional competencies of the coach, play a decisive role in the success of the coaching process.**

Based on semi-structured interviews and subjective evaluations, participants who experienced stronger collaboration with their coach reported more pronounced positive changes in affectivity, self-efficacy, well-being, performance, and goal attainment. Coaching effectiveness is fundamentally shaped by the coach's attributes – particularly their ability to build trust, employ motivational strategies, and demonstrate professional expertise. The quality of collaboration and the atmosphere of the sessions were key to the success of the process, reinforcing the importance of relational factors noted in the literature (e.g., de Haan et al., 2013; Grover and Furnham, 2016; Graßmann et al., 2020).

Findings associated with this thesis are detailed in *Chapters IV.9.* and *V.11.* of the doctoral dissertation and in the following publication:

Gerhát R. (2024). The Key Competencies of the Solution-Focused Brief Coach. *Solution-Focused Positive Psychology Magazine*.

These findings underscore that coaching success depends not only on methodological design but also on the personal characteristics of participants and the relational quality developed throughout the coaching process. Accordingly, the planning and evaluation of psychological coaching interventions must take into account both individual differences and the quality of the coaching relationship.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this doctoral research was to empirically examine the effectiveness of a three-session solution-focused brief coaching psychological intervention within an organisational context among non-managerial employees. Based on the findings of a randomised, controlled, longitudinal study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

**Coaching effectively supports mental well-being.** Significant positive changes were observed in levels of positive affectivity, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being among participants in the coaching process, alongside a reduction in negative affectivity. These findings confirm the suitability of coaching as a psychological intervention for enhancing employee well-being.

**Coaching enhances work performance.** According to the 360-degree evaluations, the performance of participants in the coaching group improved significantly, whereas no such change was observed in the control group. This indicates that coaching may contribute to both individual and organisational effectiveness.

**The detail of goal-setting and action planning is crucial.** Clearly, articulated goals and well-structured action plans support the effectiveness of the coaching process, particularly in relation to performance and the achievement of goals.

**Personality traits and self-awareness history influence effectiveness.** Participants with prior experience in self-awareness processes, as well as those scoring higher on traits such as openness, conscientiousness, and extraversion, demonstrated greater positive changes. This underscores the importance of considering individual differences in coaching interventions.

**The quality of the coach–coachee relationship is decisive.** A successful coaching process relies heavily on a trust-based, collaborative working relationship. The professional competencies of the coach – especially in building trust, motivating clients, and applying appropriate methodologies – directly enhance intervention outcomes.

**Coaching represents a strategic advantage for organisations.** Solution-focused brief coaching aligns well with the dynamic and hybrid nature of modern workplaces. Its brief, goal-oriented, and resource-based approach makes it a cost-effective, flexible, and efficient tool for employee development.

**The research is novel and of high domestic relevance.** To date, few empirical studies have been conducted in Hungary on the psychological mechanisms underpinning coaching.

This dissertation contributes new, scientifically grounded evidence to the domestic literature and promotes the integration of coaching psychology into international academic discourse.

In summary, coaching – particularly in the form of solution-focused brief interventions – proves to be an effective and evidence-based method for improving employee well-being and performance (e.g., Grant, 2013; Grant & Gerrard, 2019; Theeboom et al., 2014). The findings offer valuable insights for future research and the ongoing refinement of professional coaching practices.

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Registry number: DEENK/416/2025.PL  
Subject: PhD Publication List

Candidate: Réka Gerhát  
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of Human Sciences  
MTMT ID: 10060808

### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian book chapters (1)

1. **Gerhát, R.:** Kommunikációs készség.

In: Az egységes közszolgálati alapkompenciákat vizsgáló tesztrendszer pszichológiai alapjai / szerkesztette Malét-Szabó Erika, Münnich Ákos, Balázs Katalin, Hőgye Nagy Ágnes, Belügyminisztérium, Budapest, 160-177, 2023. ISBN: 9786156259196

#### Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (1)

2. **Gerhát, R., Fodor, S.:** A coaching pszichológiai intervenció meghatározása, bemutatása és megkülönböztetése más segítő folyamatoktól.

*Magyar Pszichológiai Szemle. közlésre elfogadva*, [1-52], 2025. ISSN: 0025-0279.

#### Foreign language scientific articles in international journals (2)

3. **Gerhát, R., Ocsenás, D., Münnich, Á.:** Enhancing performance, well-being and self-efficacy: A randomised controlled study in solution-focused business coaching.

*Int. J. Evid. Based Coach. Mentor.* 23 (1), 24-48, 2025. ISSN: 1741-8305.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24384/7s2w-9g73>

IF: 0.9 (2024)

4. **Gerhát, R., Ocsenás, D., Münnich, Á.:** The Impact of Personality Traits on the Effectiveness of Solution-Focused Coaching in a Workplace Context.

*International Coaching Psychology Review. "Accepted by Publisher"*, [1-47], 2025. ISSN: 2396-8753.





## List of other publications

### Hungarian book chapters (1)

5. **Gerhát, R.:** Kommunikációs készség.

In: A rendvédelmi szervek irányítói feladataira történő kompetencia alapú kiválasztás. Szerk.: Malét-Szabó Erika, Münnich Ákos, Balázs Katalin, Hidegkuti István, Hőgye-Nagy Ágnes, Belügyminisztérium, Budapest, 101-110, 2023. ISBN: 9786156259219

### Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (5)

6. Balázs, K., Babinszki, E., **Gerhát, R.:** "Dühítő ez a reklám!": Érzelmi reakciók mérése társadalmi célú reklámok esetén.

*Alk. Pszichol.* 19 (4), 7-34, 2019. ISSN: 1419-872X.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17627/ALKPSZICH.2019.4.7>

7. **Gerhát, R.**, Balázs, K., Szemán-Nagy, A.: "Jobb későn, mint soha". A halogató magatartás vizsgálata egyetemisták körében.

*Psychiatr Hung.* 32 (2), 158-167, 2018. ISSN: 0237-7896.

8. Bene, Á., Móré, M., **Gerhát, R.:** A Magyar Telekom mint nemzeti fő támogató szponzori szerepvállalása a 2017-es Vizes Világbajnokság felkészülési időszakában.

*Taylor.* 10 (2), 44-54, 2018. ISSN: 2064-4361.

9. Balázs, K., Bakó, P., **Gerhát, R.:** A Meggyőzési tudatosság: A pszichológia mostohagyereke.

*Magyar Pszichológiai Szemle.* 73 (3), 391-410, 2018. ISSN: 0025-0279.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1556/0016.2018.73.3.2>

10. **Gerhát, R.**, Balázs, K.: Az emocionális tartalmú társadalmi célú reklámvideók hatásmechanizmusának vizsgálata: Félelem és humor.

*Magyar Pszichológiai Szemle.* 73 (2), 213-235, 2018. ISSN: 0025-0279.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1556/0016.2018.73.2.5>

### Other journal articles (1)

11. **Gerhát, R.:** A sporttehetség felismerésének és fejlesztésének pszichológiai alapjai.

*Különleges bánásmód.* 2 (3), 103-104, 2016. EISSN: 2498-5368.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18458/KB.2016.3.103>

### Hungarian abstracts (1)

12. **Gerhát, R.**, Balázs, K.: Érzelmi válaszreakciók mérése különböző emocionális tartalmú társadalmi célú reklámok esetén.

In: Változás az állandóságban: A Magyar Pszichológiai Társaság XXVII. Országos Tudományos Nagygyűlése : Kivonatkötet. Szerk.: Lippai Edit, Magyar Pszichológiai Társaság, Budapest, 136, 2018. ISBN: 9786158024174





Informational/educational articles (3)

13. **Gerhát, R.:** A megoldásközpontú brief coach főbb kompetenciái.  
*Megoldásközpont Pozitív Pszichológiai Magazin 2024.05.01., [1-12], 2024.*
14. **Gerhát, R.:** Bullying: Mit tehetünk pedagógusként az iskolai bántalmazás ellen?  
*Megoldásközpont Pozitív Pszichológiai Magazin 2020.04.20, [1-9], 2020.*
15. **Gerhát, R., Mohácsi, R.:** Cyberbullying Magyarországon ? Minden 3. gyermek áldozattá válik!  
*Megoldásközpont Pozitív Pszichológiai Magazin 2020.07.27, [1-12], 2020.*

**Total IF of journals (all publications): 0,9**

**Total IF of journals (publications related to the dissertation): 0,9**

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of the Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) database.

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