

# Highlights from Day 2 of the 9th International Congress of Coaching Psychology

## Positive and Coaching Psychology: Wellbeing, Sustainability and Achieving Balance

Friday 11 October 2019, London UK

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### Abstract

This report details highlights from Day 2 of the 9th International Congress of Coaching Psychology, held on Friday 11 October 2019 in London. The theme of the congress was Positive and Coaching Psychology: Wellbeing, Sustainability and Achieving Balance, and encompassed sessions within two streams, mental health and ecopsychology. This report focusses mainly on sessions from the ecopsychology stream and is intended to summarise the topics for interested parties who were unable to attend.

**Keywords:** *Coaching psychology; positive psychology; ecopsychology; congress*

### Abstrait

*Ce rapport détaille les faits saillants du Jour 2 du 9e Congrès international de psychologie du coaching, qui s'est tenu le vendredi 11 octobre 2019 à Londres. Le thème du congrès était Psychologie positive et coaching: bien-être, durabilité et équilibre, et comprenait des sessions dans deux volets, la santé mentale et l'écopsychologie. Ce rapport se concentre principalement sur les sessions du volet écopsychologie et vise à résumer les sujets pour les parties intéressées qui n'ont pas pu y assister.*

**Mots clés:** *Psychologie de l'entraînement; psychologie positive; l'écopsychologie; congrès*

The dank London weather didn't dampen the spirits of attendees at this year's annual congress of the International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP). The theme of the congress was Positive and Coaching Psychology: Wellbeing, Sustainability and Achieving Balance, and it attracted delegates from all over the globe.

Day 1 of the congress consisted of two masterclasses. I attended Day 2, the conference day, along with over 100 other psychologists, coaching psychologists, positive psychologists, coaches, therapists/counsellors, students and others interested in learning more about the field. Dr Siobhain O'Riordan, Chair of the ISCP, welcomed the group to the conference day,

which centred around two parallel streams. The first stream focussed on mental health, a topic that unfortunately affects an increasing proportion of coaching sessions. I chose to attend sessions mostly from the ecopsychology stream, a topic I had not previously considered in the context of coaching.

In the opening ecopsychology session, Dr Alison Whybrow gave a heartfelt presentation about how coaching psychologists and coaches can incorporate discussions around the climate emergency into their practice. She explained that the unparalleled global scale of the situation is indeed on the minds of coachees and coaches alike. While it's important for coaches not to bring their own agenda into coaching sessions, Dr Whybrow offered a framework for legitimising conversations about climate change which allows coachees to explore how they might make eco-conscious choices for the future of their families and businesses. Offering coachees the choice to discuss the climate emergency ensures that the coachee retains control over how much or little they wish to bring it into their coaching sessions. Ultimately, Dr Whybrow suggested that by normalising conversations about the climate emergency, coaches can help to spread the word and make a real difference to the future of our planet.

The Day 2 Keynote lecture was presented by Professor Almuth McDowall from Birkbeck University London. In today's world where we spend more time online than ever before (Ofcom, 2018), it's becoming more and more important to find ways to switch off and make sure we engage in restorative activities at the end of the busy working day. The empowerment-enslavement paradox of digital devices presents a real struggle for many, in our personal lives and in the workplace.

Professor McDowell presented her research showing that very few UK organisations have policies in place regarding out of hours working (McDowall & Kinman, 2017). It's largely seen as the individual's responsibility to regulate their own device-checking behaviour. Professor McDowell noted that more needs to be done to offset the negative impact of the digital revolution on the general wellbeing of our society. As coaches, it's important to acknowledge the impact of device-checking on an individual's wellbeing. The inability to switch off can fuel feelings of anxiety, overwhelm, lack of sleep – all of which can build up to negatively affect long-term mental wellbeing.

A number of research papers were presented throughout the day on topics that are pushing the boundaries of our understanding of coaching psychology. These included:

- Tünde Erdős presented her ongoing research into how non-verbal communication between coach and coachee can affect the outcomes of coaching sessions.

- The PhD research student Marcela Almeida Alves described her doctoral research project, co-supervised by Professor Maria João Gouveia and Professor Stephen Palmer. In a detailed 12-session coaching programme, the BeST Programme was piloted in a Portuguese corporate setting, and focused on positive group coaching in the workplace. Outcomes of the programme included significantly improved wellbeing and health, and work engagement.

- Alan Wingrove discussed the need for more research into the needs of internal coaches and the specialised supervision needed for this unique type of coaching situation.

- Dr Alanna O'Broin showed preliminary data in a new field of research, on the potential negative outcomes associated with coaching. Little is known about this new field of research, but Dr O'Broin invited delegates to discuss how we can design studies to learn more, and how to use the findings.

- Professor Stephen Palmer (Coordinating Director of the ISCP International Centre for Coaching Psychology Research) and Dr Zelda Di Blasi from University College Cork, Ireland talked about their ongoing research into how walking coaching sessions can enhance the beneficial effects of coaching vs a typical sit-down setting (Palmer & Di Blasi, 2019). Most adults in the UK now sit for over 9 hours a day on average, and prolonged sitting is associated with many detrimental effects on health, including increased risk of colon cancer, depression and even Alzheimer's disease (BHF, 2019). Any effort to incorporate walking – especially in natural surroundings – into everyday activities can lessen these detrimental effects, stimulating restorative and creative impulses. The benefits of walking, as compared to sitting, coaching sessions include increased feelings of empathy between coachee and manager, which was deemed particularly significant because lack of managerial support is a common reason for leaving a job.

In the second keynote lecture of the day Dr Ceri M. Sims from Buckinghamshire New University took the audience through a brief history of positive psychology. She focussed on the recent 'second wave' of positive psychology which embraces both positive and negative aspects of the individual (Sims, 2017). Applying this to a strengths-based approach to coaching, Dr Sims asked how positive psychology coaching can enable leaders to be the best they can be during complex, uncertain and difficult times.

Citing an anonymised case study of a senior leader whom she coached, she used the Strengthscope© methodology to identify the coachee's work-related strengths. Asking the coachee to describe his 'best-self' also helped him understand his core beliefs and values. Together, these methods identified the coachee's strengths and formed

a basis for him to use them to be an even better leader. Dr Sims gave the audience some useful practical tips on how to use appreciative strengths-based coaching and positive psychology in any workplace coaching setting.

Altogether, the congress provided a wide-ranging insight into the latest research in coaching psychology, and how that research can be put into practice to enhance outcomes for coachees. The engaging format of the meeting, which included poster discussions, flash poster presentations and even a group 'walk and talk' session, provided a useful and enjoyable day for all those in attendance. ■

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### Website

9th ICCP website:

<https://www.isfcp.info/conferences/9th-international-congress-of-coaching-psychology-london-10-11-october-2019/>

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### Biography

**Sarah Nelson PhD** is an independent medical writer working in the medical communications industry. She recently became a certified coach, following training with the Centre for Coaching in London, and is a member of the International Society of Coaching Psychology.

Sarah gained a BSc in Zoology from Imperial College London, before continuing her PhD studies at University of Cambridge. Sarah then moved across the pond for her postdoctoral research. She spent over five years in Boston, MA, USA, investigating insulin receptor signalling in diabetes, at the Joslin Diabetes Centre and Children's Hospital Boston in collaboration with Harvard Medical School.

Sarah has recently started her own venture, Green Pen Solutions, which offers medical writing, coaching and training for medical communications agencies.

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