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Can Group Coaching Support The Career Advancement Of Women?

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Abstract

Group coaching enhances women's career progression by fostering social capital and overcoming barriers to informal networks. Qualitative studies demonstrate increased self-esteem, courage and resilience, aiding women in navigating gendered career challenges. This study quantitatively assesses the impact of women-only group coaching on social capital, self-esteem, resilience, courage and career advancement. Results reveal significantly higher bridging capital and courage in coached women compared to participants who did not receive coaching, though resilience and self-esteem show no significant difference. Coached women are also more likely to receive a pay rise, providing empirical support for interventions aimed at promoting female career advancement.

Introduction

Each year, substantial investments are made in equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives, yet their effectiveness remains unclear to business leaders (Novacek, Yousif, Dartnell, Farsky, Bansal, May and Zborowski, 2023). Organisations with 30% or more women on executive teams are reported to demonstrate superior business performance (Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle and Dolan, 2020), indicating benefits beyond financial gains, including talent optimisation, market alignment and increased innovation (Khushk, Zengtian and Hui, 2022). However, improving women's representation in leadership faces the complex challenge of dismantling culturally ingrained gender role expectations tied to the 'ideal worker' (Gray, De Haan and Bonneywell, 2019), with no straightforward solution.

Despite intentional efforts, the proportion of women in senior management globally has only grown from 24.1% in 2018 to 32.4% in 2023 (Grant Thornton, 2023). Yet, this growth has been slow to translate into substantial changes regarding women's influence in key positions (Joshi, Neely, Emrich, Griffiths and George, 2015).

A perceived incongruity persists between gender roles for women and the expected roles of leaders, negatively impacting women's workplace opportunities (Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, 2013). Women remain trapped in the role congruity theory of prejudice (Kubu, 2018), feeling out of place in leadership without a critical mass of female leaders (Strange, 2018). Building this critical mass across all organisational levels is crucial to address the current leaky pipeline of female talent (Edwards, Guzzo, Jackson, Knoepflmacher and Nalbantian, 2020).

Research suggests that fostering a substantial cohort of women in leadership may involve leveraging social capital and networks (Górska, Dobija, Staniszewska and Prystupa-Rządca, 2022; Sheerin & Hughes, 2018). Individuals with robust social capital reportedly experience greater self-esteem, resilience, courage and career advancement (Choi, 2019; Gardner & Pierce, 2016; Kalaitzaki, Tsouvelas and Koukouli, 2021; Schilpzand, Hekman and Mitchell, 2015). These attributes are crucial for women navigating gender dynamics, advancing careers and supporting gender parity (Bonneywell, 2017; Gyllensten et al., 2020). Our study explores whether women-only group coaching contributes to positive career outcomes, specifically addressing two questions: Is there a significant difference in social capital between women who have attended group coaching and those who have not? Furthermore, is there a significant difference in self-esteem, courage, resilience and career advancement between women who have attended group coaching and those who have not?

Our study's contributions are threefold: Firstly, it advances understanding of women's career development through exploring the outcomes of women-only group coaching. Secondly, it provides practical insights for coaches to enhance their approaches for supporting women. Thirdly, it advocates for gender-inclusive organisational strategies, emphasising the value of integrating group coaching into initiatives fostering gender equality within organisations.

Literature review

Group coaching

Although group coaching dates back to the late 1990s (Sherman & Freas, 2004), the theoretical understanding of group coaching remains underdeveloped, with no consensus on its definition. Bonneywell and Gannon (2021:3) view group coaching as "coaching individuals from a similar population for growth and development, even if they are not working together towards a common goal", while Van Dyke (2014:72) defines it as "exploring the coaching process within a group coached by a professional coach, using the group dynamic to achieve the goals and objectives of each individual." Thornton (2016) distinguishes two main domains within group coaching: team coaching and coaching learning groups. The present study focuses on the latter, defined as groups actively convening multiple times to foster learning (Thornton, 2016).

Our study positions group coaching at the confluence of coaching, group dynamics and facilitation. To comprehend group coaching, it is crucial to consider it within the broader context of group dynamics and facilitation theory. Group dynamics explores how individuals in a group act and react to changing circumstances (Lewin, 1951). Positive social dynamics, creating group cohesion through behaviours like positive anticipation and mutual observation, contribute to personal security and active participation in group coaching (Fusco, O Riordan and Palmer, 2015). Emotional support and normalisation enhance psychological safety, fostering self-exploration and learning, aligning with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Pratt et al., 2010). Therefore, group interactions can become transformative experiences and catalysts for change (Bion, 1961).

Facilitation, focusing on the learning process, complements group dynamics. The group coach facilitates the learning process, ensuring each member receives basic coaching instruction such as using open questions, presenting challenges, making observations and providing feedback, while

refraining from giving advice (Fusco et al., 2015). Effective facilitation encourages equal participation, promoting individual self-expression, authenticity and recognising the inherent value of each member (Hunter, 2007).

Although group coaching relies on the coach's facilitation skills, it distinguishes itself from group facilitation in several ways. In group coaching, the primary objective is the individual self-discovery and learning of its members (Alexander, Bonnema, Farmer and Reimold, 2020; Thornton, 2016). The group coach actively participates in the dialogue and collaborates with other group participants to collectively work towards the coaching goals (Clutterbuck, 2007). Conversely, group facilitation centres around achieving consensus on decision-making and group problem-solving (Van Dyke, 2014). The group facilitator primarily focuses on the dynamics of the group process and maintains a level of detachment from the group (Clutterbuck, 2007).

Built on these foundational principles, we propose that group coaching comprises five core components, regardless of format, approach, or context. Understanding these components is crucial for defining group coaching clearly and explaining its anticipated impact.

The first core component emphasises that group coaching is participant-led. Individuals gather for learning, engaging in exchanges that expand awareness on the chosen topic, which is determined by participants, not the coach.

The second core component is the establishment of a supportive environment that encourages open sharing of vulnerable experiences and exploration of options to overcome obstacles (Bonneywell, 2017). The coach prioritises curiosity and active listening, cultivating a psychologically safe space that ensures equitable participation and promotes reflective thinking (Jones & Hardigan, 2021).

The third core component distinguishing group coaching from dyadic coaching and is the interconnected web of relationships extending beyond coach-participant interactions. Participants' life experiences foster a substantial exchange of shared experiences, expanding connections within the group coaching environment (Bonneywell & Gannon, 2021).

The fourth core component centres around goals. In group coaching, each participant defines their session focus, including a specific goal (Britton, 2019). Sessions start with a check-in and end with a check-out, allowing participants to reflect on learning, insights and progress towards goals.

Lastly, group coaching involves ongoing accountability through continuous conversations. It is not a one-time event, as the coach encourages participants to connect coaching discussions with their life-work context, fostering reflection, action and a sense of public commitment (Britton, 2015).

Limited quantitative studies support the positive impact of group coaching, revealing enhanced leadership effectiveness (Mühlberger & Traut-Mattausch, 2015) and improved self-awareness and engagement (Sutton & Crobach, 2022). In the context of women, group coaching has been shown to enhance wellbeing, provide support and reduce burnout (de Haan, Gray and Bonneywell, 2019; Fainstad, Mann, Suresh, Shah, Dieujuste, Thurmon and Jones, 2022). While these studies quantify the impact, we propose an opportunity to further explore women-only group coaching, assessing its effectiveness in building essential resources for women's professional growth. This includes examining its role in fostering social capital, self-esteem, resilience, courage and directly influencing career progress.

Social capital

Social capital denotes an individual's potential resources derived from social connections, including interaction, mobilisation of others and social support (Williams, 2006). High levels of social capital

yield direct benefits such as information, opportunities and resources, leading to power, influence, improved working conditions and career promotion (Dobrev & Merluzzi, 2018). Deficiencies in social capital and supportive networks contribute to gender disparities in senior positions for women's career progression (Sheerin & Hughes, 2018).

Social capital was defined by Putnam as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (2000:19), therefore, the outcome rather than the network of social relationships (Williams, 2006). Social capital is the sum of bonding (exclusive) and bridging (inclusive) capital.

Bonding capital involves individuals finding connections because of their similarities such as families, friends and neighbours. It is criticised for its exclusivity because it might prevent underrepresented groups, for instance women in leadership positions, from reaching their full potential (Pillai, Hodgkinson, Kalyanaram and Nair, 2017). In contrast, bridging capital, refers to connections between individuals from diverse backgrounds, including employees from different organisations, professional colleagues and members of various social groups. The benefits of bonding capital relate to the depth of the connections while bridging capital relate to the breadth of connections (Williams, 2006).

Górska et al.'s (2022) recent qualitative study highlights the need for women, especially in male-dominated workplaces, to leverage bridging capital for leadership success, contrary to men benefiting from bonding capital's exclusive ties (Socratous, 2018). In the realm of group coaching, Bonneywell (2017) suggests that women not only experiment with building social capital during sessions, but also extend these connections beyond sessions, thus creating a 'ripple effect.' This effect enables women to establish their own 'girls club,' addressing the challenge of developing social capital as underrepresented leaders (Mavin, Williams, Bryans and Patterson, 2014). This aligns with Yang et al.'s (2019) findings, indicating high-ranking women benefit from strong connections in a female-dominated inner circle, broadening their access to diverse relationships. Consequently, these connections enable them to access a wider range of relationship s.

Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Bridging capital will be significantly higher for women who have attended group coaching compared to those who have not.

H2: Bonding capital will be significantly higher for women who have attended group coaching compared to those who have not.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem, the individual assessment of one's self-worth and self-respect (Rosenberg, 1965), is crucial for understanding wellbeing and success (Monteiro et al., 2022). Organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE) extends this to the workplace, gauging an individual's belief in their worth, value and competence within the organisation (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings and Dunham, 1989).

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) informs how group coaching affects self-esteem. Group membership and identity influence self-esteem (Kim et al., 2018) and in group coaching, participants find belonging, acceptance and validation (Bonneywell & Gannon, 2021). Furthermore, group coaching facilitates self-reflection and self-awareness, resulting in a more positive self-perception (Sutton & Crobach, 2022). Qualitative research shows group coaching provides social support, personal growth and positive dynamics, boosting self-esteem (Bonneywell, 2017); thus aligning with findings that combined female group and individual coaching, which also enhanced women's self-esteem (De-Valle, 2014; Skinner, 2014).

Consequently, it is hypothesised that:

H3: Organisational-based self-esteem will be significantly higher for women who have attended group coaching compared to those who have not.

Resilience

Effectively navigating challenges, change and uncertainty while learning from setbacks is vital for women's leadership (Jansen & Terblanche, 2021). This capacity, known as resilience, is seen as an inherent trait or a dynamic process drawing on positive resources (Ayed, Toner and Priebe, 2019). These resources often derive from social systems, where individuals in well-established and supportive organisations or communities tend to navigate adversity more effectively than those lacking such support (Southwick, Sippel, Krystal, Charney, Mayes and Pietrzak, 2016).

Brown's (2006) shame resilience theory supports the link between group coaching and resilience. The theory suggests that resilience can be cultivated by connecting with one's authentic self and building meaningful relationships (Ryan-DeDominicis, 2021). Group coaching creates a supportive environment for sharing vulnerable experiences and for open dialogue, exploring solutions and normalising experiences through discussions on sociocultural expectations, thus reassuring participants. Group sessions cultivate empathic relationships, emphasising non-judgmental attitudes, perspective-taking, understanding, and effective communication (Van Beveren, Roets, Buysse and Rutten, 2018). This is supported by Alexander et al.'s (2020) case study where group coaching was used to foster resilience, leading to reduced burnout and turnover intention in female participants.

Consequently, it is hypothesised that:

H4: Resilience will be significantly higher for women who have attended group coaching compared to those who have not.

Courage

Courage is conceptualised in two ways (Tkachenko, Quast, Song and Jang, 2020). The first sees courage as a trait or disposition, involving the will to achieve goals despite opposition (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The second views courage as a behavioural response in social contexts (Pury & Starkey, 2010), defined as actions overcoming risks to relationships or social standing that could harm the individual's relationships or image (Schilpzand et al., 2015). In organisations, research identifies courage in the workplace as vital for leadership effectiveness, impacting performance and image (Tkachenko et al., 2020). Workplace courage is seen as a social phenomenon where employees exhibit courageous actions when dealing with challenging situations like work errors or abuses of power (Schilpzand et al., 2015).

Recent group coaching studies show that participants credit group coaching with increased awareness in their leadership practice (Gyllensten, Henschel and Jones, 2020; Sutton & Crobach, 2022) leading to changes in behaviour, such as clearer communication and increased courage in leadership roles (Gyllensten et al., 2020; Malling, De Lasson, Just and Stegeager, 2020). Participants in the Malling et al.'s (2020) study became aware of workplace dynamics, emphasised relationship building and found it easier to seek help, support and feedback, demonstrating the courage to take the lead and speak up.

Given that group coaching provides a supportive space for discussing situations and practicing conversations requiring courage, it is hypothesised that:

H5: Courage will be significantly higher for women who have attended group coaching compared to those who have not.

Career advancement

An individual's career success is dependent on their accumulated work experience and can be measured through the notion of career advancement (Seibert et al., 2001). Career advancement is the objective component of career success and often includes indicators such as an increase in salary, promotions and job rankings throughout an individual's professional life (Heslin, 2005). In the context of group coaching research, understanding the impact of group coaching on objective measures of career success is particularly important due to the reliance in the coaching literature on self-reported outcomes (Bozer & Jones, 2018).

Given that research in the field of social capital has consistently demonstrated the positive impact on career advancement and career success (e.g., Choi, 2019; Imhanrenialena, Cross, Ebhotemhen, Chukwu and Oforkansi, 2022), if group coaching is found to have the anticipated positive impact on social capital, then a logical progression is that group coaching will also positively impact on career advancement.

Therefore, we predict:

H6: Women who have participated in group coaching will be significantly more likely to have received a promotion when compared to women who have not participated in group coaching.

H7: Women who have participated in group coaching will be significantly more likely to have received a salary increase when compared to women who have not participated in group coaching.

Methodology

This quantitative study employed a between-groups design to compare women who attended group coaching with those who did not.

Participants

A total of 111 women participated in the study, most of whom were employees of the sponsoring company, a Brazilian EdTech start-up. 58 of these women attended group coaching sessions, which were organised into five groups. The first group began in October 2020, the second in April 2021, the third in August 2021, the fourth in March 2022 (not from the sponsoring company) and the fifth in August 2022. Descriptive demographics (Table 1) indicate a mean age of 37.2 years (*SD* = 8.92), mean work experience of 16.89 years (*SD* = 8.94) and mean time in current roles of 3.86 years (*SD* = 4.49). Approximately 73 per cent hold leadership positions, with functions being Operations (24.32 per cent), Marketing and Sales (15.32 per cent), Management and Administration (11.71 per cent), Legal and Regulatory (9.91 per cent), Product Development and Finance (9.01 per cent each). All participants identified as women.

Table 1: Participant demographics

	All Participants				Group Coaching				Non-Group Coaching			
	N = 111				*n* = 58				*n* = 52			
	n	%	*Mean*	*SD*	*n*	%	*Mean*	*SD*	*n*	%	*Mean*	*SD*
Age	111		37.20	8.92	58		35.29	7.72	52		39.29	9.82
Worked years	111		16.89	8.94	58		15.38	8.13	52		18.42	9.61
Time in current job	105		3.86	4.49	55		3.94	5.03	49		3.82	3.86
Location (Brazil)	106	95.50			57	98.28			48	92.31		
Ethnicity												
Asian	2	1.80			2	3.45			0	0.00		
African / Black	6	5.41			3	5.17			3	5.77		
European / White	48	43.24			27	46.55			21	40.38		
Latin	34	30.63			20	34.48			14	26.92		
Mixed Ethnicity	19	17.12			6	10.34			12	23.08		
Not declared	2	1.80			0	0.00			2	3.85		
Role level			Managerial Level				Managerial Level		0	0.00	Managerial Level	
Senior Manager	50	45.05	72.97%		24	41.38	81.03%		26	50.00	65.38%	
Middle Manager	15	13.51			11	18.97			4	7.69		
Junior Manager	16	14.41			12	20.69			4	7.69		
Non-Managerial	25	22.52			8	13.79			16	30.77		
Not Working	5	4.50			3	5.17			2	3.85		

Intervention

Eight weekly, one-hour online coaching sessions were conducted via Zoom over three months, with 12 participants per group. All sessions were led by the first author, an experienced coach with 12 years of practice, an MSc in Coaching and Behaviour Change and ICF (International Coach Federation) PCC (Professional Certified Coach) accreditation.

Before the group sessions, each participant had an individual coaching session to identify strengths and key themes for achieving their main leadership goals. Common themes included self-esteem, authenticity and communication skills. This approach ensured that the group coaching remained participant-led, with a focus on topics tailored to each individual's development. See table 2 for the group coaching framework.

Table 2: Group coaching intervention framework

Session	Description
#1 (Foundation)	Ground rules were set to ensure confidentiality, psychological safety and a supportive space for open sharing. Participants presented their leadership goals and challenges. The coach introduced reflective thinking, curiosity and active listening as core skills, with the check-in and check-out process established to encourage accountability.
#2 to #7 (Development)	Each session began with a reminder of the ground rules, followed by a check-in where participants reflected on their progress and explored new strategies from the pre-work. The pre-work involved watching TED Talks on agreed leadership themes and using Driscoll's "What, So What, Now What" model to link insights to their goals. This exchange of perspectives helped participants learn from each other, building a peer-support network beyond the coach-participant interactions. Sessions concluded with a check-out, where key takeaways were shared and next steps outlined, reinforcing accountability.
#8 (Celebration)	The session began with ground rules, followed by a check-in where participants celebrated achievements and reflected on personal growth and leadership development. It ended with a check-out, emphasising the importance of maintaining the peer support network for future leadership challenges.

Data collection

The survey was conducted online and at the same point in time for all participants. It included questions on gender, age, ethnicity, leadership experience, field of work, participation in group coaching, recent pay rises or promotions and the measures for each variable used in this study.

Measures

Social capital (bridging and bonding capital). Both bridging and bonding capital were assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Personal Social Capital in organisations (Ben-Hador, Eckhaus and Klein, 2021). The bridging capital sub-scale consisted of 11 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is "I actively participate in various workplace activities." The reliability coefficient for this sample was α = 0.78. The bonding capital sub-scale consisted of 12 items, with an example item being "I have close connections with influential individuals in different settings." The reliability coefficient for this sample was α = 0.84.

Self-esteem. Pierce et al.'s (1989) 10-item Organisation-Based Self-Esteem scale was used to measure self-esteem. Participants used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item includes "I am helpful around here." The reliability coefficient for this sample was α = 0.90.

Resilience. Resilience was measured using Neill and Dias's (2001) 15-item Perceived Resilience scale. Responses were measure on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An example item from this scale is "I have self-discipline." The reliability coefficient for this sample was α = 0.86.

Courage. Howard, Farr, Grandey and Gutworth's (2017) 11-item Workplace Social Courage scale was used to measure courage. Responses were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An example item from this scale is "Even if my co-worker might be offended, I would suggest better alternatives for doing things." The reliability coefficient for this sample was α = 0.80.

Career advancement. Following the approach of Imhanrenialena et al. (2022), participants were asked two questions to assess their career advancement: "In the past two years, have you received one or more promotion(s)?" "In the past two years, have you received one or more salary increase(s)?"

The survey was initially created in English and then translated into Brazilian Portuguese, the participants' native language. Following the methodology of Kalaitzaki et al. (2021), the survey was first translated by a bilingual Brazilian. It was then independently back-translated into English by an English bilingual who had not seen the original version. A comparison between the translated and original surveys resulted in minor vocabulary adjustments.

After obtaining ethical approval, a pilot test was conducted with ten women who had participated in group coaching. This test aimed to evaluate the design, duration and clarity of the questions (Hair, Black and Anderson, 2010). No significant changes were necessary based on the pilot test results, so the data collected from the pilot were included in the final analysis.

Data analysis

The descriptive statistics for all variables were calculated to determine frequency distribution, central tendency as mean, dispersion as standard deviation and shape of distribution to check for normal distribution. Kurtosis and Skewness were also checked. Inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses. For hypotheses H1 to H5, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess the potential significant difference between group coaching and no group coaching on the composite dependent variable derived from the five individual dependent variables (bridging capital, bonding capital, self-esteem, resilience and courage). Additionally, univariate results were examined for each of those five dependent variables separately.

For hypothesis H6 and H7, Chi-Square tests of independence was conducted to examine the association between the categorical independent variables (career advancement as measured by promotion and pay increase) (Pallant, 2020) for the categorical dependent variable (group coaching versus no group coaching).

Results

Descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlations

	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Bridging Capital	3.39	0.62	(.78)					
2. Bonding Capital	3.33	0.63	.64***	(.84)				
3. Self-Esteem	4.16	0.56	.42***	.54***	(.90)			
4. Resilience	5.67	0.66	.31**	.29**	.55***	(.86)		
5. Courage	5.66	0.71	.28**	.22*	.30**	.36***	(.80)	
6. Promotion	0.49	0.50	- .02	.01	- .05	- .04	.07	
7. Pay Rise	0.59	0.49	.19	.05	.08	.01	.14	.36**

Note: N = 111 for all variables except for Self-Esteem, Resilience (N = 110) and Courage (N = 109). Cronbach's alpha shown on diagonal in parenthesis. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to compare individuals who attended group coaching with those who did not, focusing on five dependent variables: bridging capital (H1), bonding capital (H2), self-esteem (H3), resilience (H4) and courage (H5). The independent variable in the analysis was group coaching. Prior to conducting the analysis, preliminary assumption testing was performed to assess normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and multicollinearity. No significant violations were observed.

The results revealed a statistically significant difference between individuals who attended group coaching and those who did not across the combined dependent variables, $F(5, 103) = 5.24$, $p < .001$, Wilks' Lambda = .80, partial eta squared = 0.20. When examining the dependent variables separately, there was a significant difference between the two groups for bridging capital, $F(1, 107) = 8.32$, $p = .005$, partial eta squared = .07 and courage, $F(1, 107) = 19.15$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .15. Further analysis using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .01 was applied to determine the nature of these significant differences.

Upon examining the mean scores (see Table 4), it was evident that individuals who attended group coaching reported higher levels of bridging capital ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.62$) and courage ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 0.62$) compared to those who did not attend ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.57$) and ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 0.70$), respectively. Therefore, these results confirm H1 and H5. Hypotheses 2, 3 and 4 were rejected.

Table 4: Mean scores for both groups

	Group Coaching			No Group Coaching		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Bridging Capital	58	3.54	0.62	52	3.22	0.57
Bonding Capital	58	3.39	0.67	52	3.27	0.59
Organisation-Based Self-Esteem	58	4.18	0.59	52	4.16	0.56
Perceived Resilience	58	5.76	0.58	52	5.59	0.72
Social Courage	57	5.92	0.62	52	5.37	0.70

It was also hypothesised that women participating in group coaching would be more likely to experience career advancement as measured by job promotion (H6) and salary increase (H7).

The Chi-Square tests of independence indicated that there was no significant association between group coaching for women and job promotion, X^2 (1, n = 110) = 0.99, p = 0.32, phi = - 0.12. Therefore, H6 was rejected. However, there was a significant association between group coaching and salary increase, X^2 (1, n =110) = 4.94, p = 0.03, phi = 0.23. Table 5 indicates that significantly more women in the group coaching condition received a pay rise compared to women in the no group coaching condition. Therefore, H7 was supported.

Table 5: Frequency of pay rise for both groups

	Total N = 110		Group Coaching n = 58		No Group Coaching n = 52	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Pay Rise	66	60.0	41	70.7	25	48.1
No pay rise	44	40.0	17	29.3	27	51.9
Total	110	100.0	58	100.0	52	100.0

Discussion

This study investigated if group coaching recipients show higher levels of bridging capital, bonding capital, self-esteem, resilience, courage and career advancement than participants who did not receive coaching. Findings indicate that women who attended group coaching exhibit higher bridging capital and courage, with a higher likelihood of receiving a pay rise. However, there is no significant difference in bonding capital, resilience, self-esteem and job promotions.

The impact of group coaching on social capital

The findings support H1, confirming higher bridging capital for women who have attended group coaching compared to those who have not. This echoes earlier qualitative studies supporting the idea that group coaching enhances the quality of informal networks, fostering connections beyond the organisational boundaries (Bonneywell & Gannon, 2021; Gray et al., 2019).

Group coaching provides a platform for women from diverse backgrounds and job roles to confidentially connect, building relationships and gaining insights into each other's contexts (Bonneywell, 2017). Such connections extend beyond the group, creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and understanding of the broader business landscape (Bonneywell & Gannon, 2021). Bridging capital, especially vital for women facing barriers to career progression due to limited access to informal networks (McGuire, 2000, 2002), facilitates the identification and utilisation of career advancement opportunities (Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012).

Conversely, the findings of this study have rejected H2, indicating no statistically significant difference in women's bonding capital between those who participated in group coaching and those who did not. This suggests that the group coaching intervention may not have effectively nurtured deep connections beyond the coaching sessions, failing to promote bonding capital (Williams, 2006).

The impact of group coaching on self-esteem

The results show no significant self-esteem difference between women who attended group coaching and those who did not, rejecting H3. This contrasts with qualitative studies suggesting coaching enhances self-esteem (Bonneywell, 2017; De-Valle, 2014; Skinner, 2014). The absence of significant findings may stem from qualitative improvements not translating into quantifiable differences. Furthermore, Gardner's (2020) idea that self-esteem arises from various life situations suggests group coaching may positively influence a broader self-esteem conceptualisation rather than the organisational-based self-esteem measured here.

The impact of group coaching on resilience

The results led to rejecting H4, revealing no significant difference in women's resilience between women who attended group coaching and those who did not. This contrasts with the findings of Alexander et al. (2020) and Jung and Kim (2021), where group coaching improved workplace resilience and motivation in the former and overall resilience in the latter. This inconsistency may stem from varying resilience measurement approaches. Smith (2017) identifies three: the 'asset approach' that rates resilience based on individual traits, the 'systemic approach' that considers external factors like social support and the 'developmental approach' that views resilience as an evolving entity that improves with past experiences. Our 'asset approach,' employing Neill and Dias's (2001) Perceived Resilience scale, differs from Jung and Kim's approach (which emphasised systemic and developmental aspects), possibly explaining the difference in results.

The impact of group coaching on courage

The results upheld H5, indicating higher courage in women who attended group coaching. This aligns with studies citing group coaching's role in fostering courage, enabling individuals to seek help, support, feedback and take on leadership roles (Gyllensten et al., 2020; Malling et al., 2020). Enhanced courage is crucial for women navigating career progression, especially in male-dominated environments where they may face discrimination (Górska et al., 2022). As Bonneywell (2016:100) noted, "Group coaching let me know that I am not alone and I may go to places I wouldn't go on my own."

Group coaching and career advancement

Career advancement was operationalised as job promotion (H6) and pay rise (H7). The results led to rejecting H6 as there was no significant positive relationship found between group coaching and job promotion. However, the results did confirm H7, as there was a significant positive association between women who attended group coaching and salary increase. A possible explanation is that job promotions may be more heavily influenced by external factors such as vacancy availability, which may have influenced our results.

Limitations

Although conducted in Brazil, our findings hold international relevance, aligning with roles observed in various industries and regions (Sutton & Crobach, 2022). However, country-specific differences in social capital may affect career advancement, as research in the U.S. and Nigeria has shown divergent outcomes (Choi, 2019; Imhanrenialena et al., 2022). Additionally, the format of the group coaching, specifically the number of participants (twelve) and the duration of the eight programme sessions (one hour) may account for some discrepancies in the findings. Thornton (2016) did not address the impact of sample size or session duration in group coaching however Britton (2015) suggested limiting group coaching to a maximum of eight participants. With regards to duration of session, existing literature shows considerable variation, with some studies involving ten 50-minute sessions (Jung & Kim, 2021), others having two 90-minute sessions with twelve participants (Alexander et al., 2020) and some running six four-hour sessions with seven participants (Bonneywell & Gannon 2021). Furthermore, the non-experimental design limits our ability to draw causal conclusions, with a randomised control trial being necessary for such inferences (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). Despite these limitations, our study provides initial evidence of differences in bridging capital, courage and pay increases from women-only group coaching.

Future Research

Additional research is essential to address potential study limitations and consolidate our findings. A key area for future empirical work involves expanding this research with an experimental design

to isolate the impact of group coaching and establish causal links among variables. Incorporating participants from diverse countries and industries may enhance the generalisability of our study's findings.

While our results highlight the connection between group coaching, bridging capital and courage, future research could explore the mechanism through which single-gendered group coaching influences outcomes. Functional groups have the potential to amplify diverse viewpoints, fostering learning in an interpersonal setting. Creating a psychologically safe environment is crucial for effective group coaching, so a second suggestion is to explore variables such as psychological safety to elucidate how group coaching enhances bridging capital and courage.

A final recommendation to build on our findings is to adopt an observational approach. Given the intricate and dynamic nature of interactions in group coaching sessions, this approach can help correlate coaching behaviours with outcomes, identifying the skills coaches must employ to create ideal conditions for well-functioning group coaching sessions and maximise career advancement opportunities for group members.

Practical Implications

As an early quantitative exploration of women-only group coaching's impact on career advancement, this study bears practical implications for women and organisations. For women aspiring to advance, group coaching may enhance bridging capital and courage, offering access to diverse networks, especially benefiting those feeling discouraged or isolated. Connecting with like-minded women allows sharing experiences, gaining perspectives and building a supportive network to navigate workplace challenges. For organisations striving for gender parity, group coaching serves two key purposes. It fosters bridging capital for underrepresented women, reducing isolation and preventing disengagement. Additionally, it proves a cost-effective means to cultivate courage, enabling women to actively contribute and advance in their careers.

Conclusion

This study enhances our understanding of group coaching as both a social activity and a process, cultivating social capital resources. It delves into group coaching's role in relation to women's bridging capital, courage and career advancement, particularly salary increases. Three contributions to existing literature emerge.

The primary contribution expands knowledge in women-only group coaching, emphasising outcomes like bolstering bridging capital, cultivating courage and securing pay rises. It empowers women to overcome challenges on their path to leadership positions.

The second contribution provides practical insights for coaches, suggesting women-only group coaching enhances female participation. We article five core components of group coaching: participant-driven discussions, a supportive environment, interconnected relationships, goal setting and sustained accountability.

The third contribution underscores integrating group coaching in organisations to advance gender equality. Tailored women-only group coaching catalyses workplace diversity, supporting women to overcome systemic barriers to career progression.

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