

Climate change & Coaching Psychologists: Exploring attitudes, perspectives and future intentions



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Abstract

Introduction: Climate change is increasingly recognised as a critical global challenge, significantly affecting ecological stability and human wellbeing. Coaching psychology, as a discipline supporting behavioural and attitudinal change, has potential relevance in addressing climate-related issues. However, the role and attitudes of coaching psychologists towards climate change remain relatively unexplored. This research aims to explore coaching psychologists' attitudes, perspectives and intentions to address climate change issues, with specific reference to members of coaching psychology professional bodies across the UK, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

Method: This study employed an online exploratory survey consisting of 12 multiple-choice and open-ended questions to explore the views of coaching psychologists, predominantly members of the British Psychological Society's Division of Coaching Psychology. The survey was conducted online and ethical approval was obtained from Henley Business School. This method was most appropriate for this exploratory survey for obtaining responses from all members of professional bodies of coaching psychology in the UK, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. The questions addressed definitions of climate change, perceived roles and responsibilities of coaching psychologists, and expectations from professional bodies. A total of 45 coaching psychologists completed the survey.

Results: Participants' responses were analysed using a simple descriptive statistical analysis. This type of analysis is the most appropriate for an online survey. Participants broadly acknowledged climate change as a legitimate coaching concern (38%), although attitudes varied from strong advocacy for proactive engagement to cautious neutrality. Coaches highlighted the emotional, behavioural, and systemic complexities associated with climate change, indicating a preference for professional bodies to provide clear ethical guidance, targeted training, and resources to support client conversations about climate-related issues.

Discussion: The findings illustrate coaching psychologists' emerging recognition of their potential role in climate action, reflecting broader literature emphasizing psychology's critical contributions to addressing climate change.

Conclusion: Coaching psychologists display growing interest and varied readiness to engage professionally with climate change, highlighting opportunities and challenges for professional practice development. The findings of this research provide preliminary insights on the role coaching psychologists can play to address climate change issues. Further research is needed and we advocate for strong cross-professional body collaborations on this issue to develop practical actions that coaches can take to address the climate change emergency/crisis.

Key words: Climate change, Climate Coaching psychology, Climate crisis, Global warming, Coach survey

Introduction

Climate Change as an Environmental Challenge

Climate change represents one of the most pressing global crises facing humanity in the 21st century, with implications for environmental stability, biodiversity, and human welfare (NASA, 2024). Over recent decades, substantial evidence has demonstrated a significant increase in global surface temperatures, primarily attributed to human activities, notably the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and unsustainable agricultural practices (WMO, 2025). These anthropogenic factors have led to significant increases in carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere from pre-industrial periods, accelerating the greenhouse effect and resulting in observable changes such as retreat of polar ice caps, rising sea levels, and increases in severe weather events from wildfires to flooding (Copernicus, 2024; NOAA, 2025).

Global awareness regarding the seriousness of climate change has intensified, underscored by recent data that has shown the period since 2020 has recorded some of the warmest years on record (AP News, 2025). Despite overwhelming scientific agreement, debates persist regarding the urgency of the problem, its causes and thus the nature of the human response needed. Critics argue that climate policies may impede economic growth or exaggerate warming predictions (BBC, 2025a; van Rensburg, 2015). Nevertheless, the consensus within scientific communities underscores the imperative for immediate and sustained global action to manage the risks associated with climate change (Basseches et al., 2022).

Coaching and Climate Change

Professional coaching has emerged over the past three decades as a valuable tool for supporting behavioural change. Coaching psychologists engage leaders and decision-makers, positioning them uniquely to influence attitudes and behaviours towards climate-related actions (Passmore, 2025). Despite this potential, the literature examining the intersection between coaching psychology and climate change remains limited. Recent contributions to this emergent field, such as Turner, Hawkins, and Röell (2025), and Cox and Flynn (2022), have built on early work such as Turner, McLean and Whybrow (2021). These practitioner contributions have begun to explore how coaching can facilitate behavioural change and psychological resilience in response to environmental threats.

Turner and colleagues conducted two global surveys involving 354 coaches, supported by the Climate Coaching Alliance, finding high levels of concern about environmental issues among coaching professionals, yet relatively low confidence in integrating climate-related conversations effectively into coaching practice. Coaches reported feelings of personal responsibility alongside challenges in addressing climate issues without compromising their professional neutrality (Turner et al., 2025). This highlights a central tension within coaching psychology between advocating for ethical and sustainable practices and maintaining client-centred, non-directive methodologies.

Cox and Flynn (2022) advocated for 'Climate Change Coaching' as a distinct professional practice. They argue for coaches to proactively engage with climate-related concerns, suggesting that coaches can support clients in managing eco-anxiety and aligning personal or organizational behaviours with sustainable goals. Similarly, DiGirolamo (2024) emphasizes that coaching in the Anthropocene requires sensitivity to the existential and emotional dimensions of ecological issues, while Blaj-Ward and Molthan-Hill (2023) advocate for integrating climate awareness into educational and developmental frameworks.

Yet, despite this comparatively small number of contributions, empirical research on climate issues and coaching remains sparse. One notable attempt to quantify perceptions of climate issues within psychological practice is the Climate Change Perception Scale developed by van Valkengoed, Steg, and Perlaviciute (2024) and applied by Passmore (2025) in a coaching study. Their findings underscore significant correlations between perceptions of climate change and proactive environmental behaviours, suggesting that psychological attitudes are critical drivers of individual and collective responses.

Research Rationale

The limited empirical exploration within coaching psychology highlights a significant gap in our understanding of how coaching professionals perceive and integrate climate change into their practice. Given the critical role of coaching psychologists in shaping leaders' and organizational behaviours, it is vital to assess their readiness and willingness to incorporate climate considerations effectively.

Moreover, professional coaching bodies have generally adopted cautious stances toward climate advocacy, largely maintaining political neutrality, given the contested nature of the debate.

Specifically, this research seeks to understand coaching psychologists' definitions of climate change, their perceived roles and responsibilities concerning climate issues, and expectations of professional bodies' involvement. By leveraging a structured survey combining open-ended qualitative components with some structured response formats, the research has explored how coaching psychologists perceive and engage with climate change as an ethical, practical, and professional challenge.

Research Aims and objectives

This study aims to explore the attitudes of coaching psychologists across the UK, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand concerning climate change, including both personal and professional dimensions

The research objective is to gain knowledge about coaching psychologists' perceptions of climate change and their intentions to engage in climate change as part of their coaching psychology practice.

Research Questions

- What are coaching psychologists' attitudes and intentions to include climate change issues in coaching practice?
- How do coaching psychology practitioners perceive climate change as an important area in coaching practice?
- What is the role of a professional body in supporting coaching practitioners to deliver ethically driven practice in climate coaching?

Method

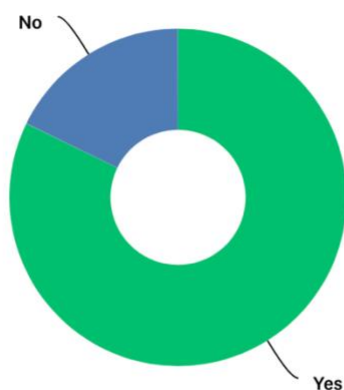
The study involved a survey method, using an online survey tool: SurveyMonkey. Items were generated by the researchers and reviewed by the BPS DoCP Committee, with invitations being sent to DoCP members and an online invitation for coaching psychologists from other societies, including South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. This was an exploratory study; hence, a survey method was most appropriate to elicit responses from coaching psychologists across a few selected countries about attitudes towards and understanding of the role of coaching psychologists in climate change actions and impact on behaviour. The survey was open for one month and a link to participate in the survey was provided to selected professional bodies in the UK, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia in March 2025.

The questionnaire, available in English only, contained 12 items of a mix of multiple-choice and open questions exploring coaching psychologists' attitudes to climate change and attitudes towards the actions of professional bodies. Ethical approval was obtained from the Henley Business School ethics committee, and further formal assistance was obtained from the Division of Coaching Psychology, British Psychological Society to forward the survey link to all members for their participation through their newsletter.

A total of 45 participants completed the survey, which took on average 8-minutes to complete. Of these 66.6% of participants identified as women, and the remainder as men. This response matches data from other large-scale coaching surveys (Passmore et al., 2017; Passmore et al., 2021; Passmore et al., 2024). In terms of age, 42.2% were aged 55-64, with 26.7% aged 45-55 and 22.2% aged 65+, with less than 9% aged below 44, again reflecting other coaching surveys, showing coaches are generally older than the average population.

Participants were predominantly White, 73.33%, with 13.33% identifying as Asian and 4.4% identifying as Mixed race/ Dual Heritage and 9% preferring not to say. No participants identified as Black. These results similarly reflect the under-representation of certain groups in both coaching and coaching psychology (Passmore et al., 2023). The majority of participants described themselves as a coaching psychologist, 82.2% (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Are you a coaching psychologist



Results

We have reported the results starting with the closed responses and moving to the open-response questions. These results are explored in more depth in the discussion section.

Figure 2 indicates that the majority of respondents (approximately 95%) have observed changes in their region, with only a small percentage (5% approximately) did not implying that coaching psychologists are aware of climate change in their region.

Figure 2: Have you observed changes in your region

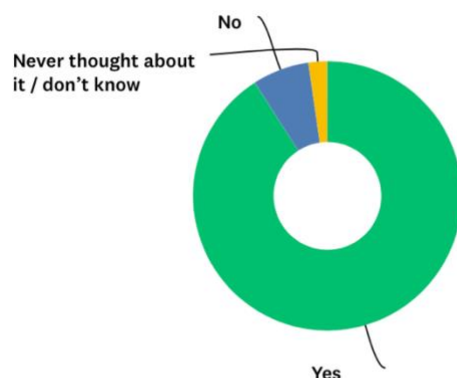


Table 1: *It is legitimate for coaches to raise the issue of climate change?*

Response	%
Strongly agree	24.4
Agree	37.8
Neither agree or disagree	15.6
Disagree	11.1
Strongly disagree	11.1

Table 1 demonstrates that a high percentage (37.8%) agree that it is legitimate for coaching practitioners to raise the issue of climate change, with a response of 24.4% for strongly agree. A small percentage (11%) has disagreed, implying their different views of climate change in coaching practice.

Table 2: *Is it important for coaching psychology to develop interventions to support coaches exploring climate change with clients?*

Response	%
Strongly agree	35.6
Agree	40
Neither agree or disagree	8.9
Disagree	6.6
Strongly disagree	8.9

Table 2 indicates that 40% 'Agree' and 35.6% 'Strongly agree' about the importance of coaching psychology to develop interventions to support coaches exploring climate change with clients, indicating the value of climate change issues in coaching practice.

How would you define climate change?

Participants' definitions and understandings of climate change reflected a wide range of psychological, emotional, behavioural, and systemic perspectives, highlighting the complexity of this concept within applied coaching psychology practice. While many participants articulated a definition rooted in environmental science—framing climate change as a pressing ecological or existential challenge—others viewed it through a psychological or relational lens, emphasizing the human experience of living with the impact of a less predictable and potentially more hostile climate with more severe weather episodes.

A prominent view across the responses was the emotional toll of climate change, with several respondents highlighting the role of coaching in supporting individuals experiencing climate-related anxiety, grief, or overwhelm. One participant noted that climate change coaching involves *“helping people to understand and navigate the changing climate and what they can do about it for themselves and others,”* pointing to a dual emphasis on agency and emotional regulation. Another described it as a process of *“supporting individuals, organisations, and leaders in overcoming eco-anxiety... while fostering proactive engagement and sustainable action,”* indicating an integration of psychological resilience with action-oriented outcomes.

Other participants adopted a systemic or existential perspective, framing climate change as the *“....a climate....catastrophe and it is the context within which all humans are operating”*. These interpretations position climate change not as a discrete issue, but as a pervasive background condition shaping the psychological and social terrain of modern life, with strong political forces surrounding and shaping the debate. For some, however, scepticism or disengagement was evident. One participant asked, *“What is the purpose of this? It seems more like a political rally... that is inappropriate for a coaching professional body,”* suggesting such issues should be left in the political sphere.

Overall, the responses reflect a broad spectrum of meaning-making, with definitions ranging from climate change as a technical or planetary crisis to a psychological, moral, and cultural challenge requiring individual and collective adaptation.

What do you believe are the processes involved in climate change?

Participants expressed a diverse and often layered understanding of the processes involved in climate change. A prevailing theme across responses was the recognition of human activity—particularly the burning of fossil fuels and overconsumption—as the primary drivers of climate change. Many highlighted the role of carbon dioxide emissions, with one respondent stating, *“The physical processes involved in climate change are 200 years of carbon dioxide being pumped into the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution.”* This technical understanding often coexisted with a recognition of the psychological processes that hinder societal response, such as *“denial, inability to*

imagine catastrophe in the future when today seems ok, avoidance of anxiety, political polarisation and misinformation.”

Some participants situated their responses within a broader systemic critique. One detailed response linked animal agriculture, industrialised farming, and neoliberal policy to environmental degradation and climate change, stating that *“Animal agriculture is a major driver of climate change, but neoliberal economic policies and Brexit have intensified its environmental and social harms. The push for industrialized farming, driven by profit and efficiency, has led to large-scale emissions, ecological destruction, and reduced environmental and animal welfare standards.”* Others pointed to ecological disconnection, asserting that climate change arises from *“broken relationships.”*

In contrast, a few participants expressed uncertainty or ambivalence, questioning the question’s clarity or relevance. One asked, *“What do you mean by processes exactly?”*

Despite this variation, there was a common thread acknowledging climate change as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. Some participants pointed to natural cycles, but most underscored anthropogenic causes and systemic failures in planning, governance, and societal responsibility. The responses reveal that participants are not only aware of the geophysical mechanisms at play but also deeply attuned to the human behaviours and institutional structures that shape our collective response to the climate crisis.

What do you believe coaches concerned about climate change should do?

Once again, participants expressed a range of perspectives regarding the role that coaches concerned about climate change should take, reflecting diverse assumptions about the nature of coaching, professional boundaries, and the urgency of the climate crisis. Responses ranged from those advocating for proactive engagement with climate issues to those warning against the imposition of personal views within coaching relationships, which should fundamentally be led by the client’s agenda.

Several participants emphasized the need for coaches to align their personal and professional practices with climate-conscious values. One respondent advocated for the importance of role modelling: *“We could show ourselves, as climate respectful models,”* while another, in a similar vein, argued that coaches should *“walk the talk... such as cutting down travel and being environmentally conscious in running our coaching practices.”* These perspectives reflect a belief that coaches can exert influence through modelling sustainable behaviours, consistent with value-based practice.

Other participants endorsed a more client-centred approach, noting that climate topics should only be addressed when explicitly raised by clients. One participant explained, *“If the topic comes up, they can work with clients’ thoughts and behaviours but without pushing their own agenda.”* Another asked whether it was ethical for the coach to broach topics not raised by the client and if such behaviour itself went against the

nature of coaching as a client led process. Such tensions were evident in many of the responses.

What should coaching psychology bodies do?

The question regarding professional coaching bodies actions also generated varying views on the professional remit of such organisations and the urgency of the climate crisis. Many respondents endorsed a more active role for coaching psychology bodies, emphasising their potential to shape practice, inform public discourse, and influence behavioural change. Others, however, expressed caution about politicisation and the risk of exceeding the profession's scope.

A significant proportion of participants argued that coaching psychology bodies should prioritise awareness-raising, professional development, and research. One participant stated that such bodies should *“develop language, acknowledge the concept, [and] develop tools and methodologies to support this,”* underscoring the need for conceptual clarity and methodological guidance. Another respondent recommended *“provide[ing] support and training in this area,”* positioning climate change as a domain requiring specific expertise.

There was also a strong call for thought leadership and public engagement. One participant asserted that professional bodies should *“model an appropriate response to climate change... [and] contribute to theory and practice to better understand human responses.”* Another saw climate psychology bodies as bridges between research, practice, and policy, suggesting the need for coaching climate bodies to collaborate with researchers and academics to develop new models and discourse to enable the debate to move forward.

Yet not all responses were supportive. One respondent warned, *“Nothing. Coaching is not the industry to address this. It is non-directive,”* while another expressed concern about *“...politicising everything.”*

This divergence suggests an ongoing debate about whether professional bodies should take a normative stance on global issues or remain strictly within their coaching remit.

Discussion

The escalating climate crisis has prompted various professions to reconsider their roles in fostering sustainable practices. Coaching psychology, dedicated to facilitating personal and professional development, may be viewed as one potential catalyst for environmental consciousness.

A definition of climate change coaching

In reviewing the 45 responses, we have sought to create a unifying definition of climate change coaching which can be widely shared by participants. In offering this definition we recognise that some individual denies the very existence of climate change while other argue for more direct action to address the challenge of our generation.

“Climate Change Coaching is an approach that aims to support individuals, groups, and organisations to understand, navigate, and respond constructively to the psychological, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of climate change. It involves facilitating reflective and action-oriented conversations that address climate-related anxieties, foster psychological resilience, and encourage sustainable behaviours aligned with personal, organisational, and societal values”.

The outcome of climate change coaching will be greater environmental awareness, enhanced personal accountability, and personal actions that individuals can take to make their contribution towards addressing what we believe is the greatest challenge facing humanity.

Integration of Climate Change into Coaching Practice

The survey reveals a nuanced stance among coaching psychologists regarding the incorporation of climate change discussions into their practice. A significant proportion acknowledged the legitimacy of addressing environmental issues during coaching sessions, when clients introduce these concerns. But are cautious about doing so as a coach-led initiative. This client-led approach aligns with traditional coaching methodologies that prioritize the client's agenda and autonomy. However, a subset of coaching psychologists advocates for a more proactive stance, suggesting that coaches have an ethical responsibility to raise climate-related topics, irrespective of client initiation. This perspective is supported by Cox and Flynn (2022), who propose that coaching can serve as a transformative tool in fostering environmental awareness and action. In contrast, professional bodies have typically remained silent on the topic not wishing to enter a debate that has become highly political and thus risk aligning themselves with specific groups within their membership. This is true of both the BPS Division of Coaching Psychology and the International Coaching Federation.

Turner, Hawkins, and Röell (2025) highlight this tension, noting that while coaches are well-positioned to influence societal issues, they must navigate the fine line between guidance and imposition.

Some respondents highlight the importance of role modelling sustainable behaviours both within and beyond their practice. These actions might include making environmentally informed decisions as to how they deliver, such as minimizing travel or migrating to either walking and talking or using digital platforms, as well as making climate-sensitive personal choices in terms of electric cars, stopping airplane travel, or introducing solar panels or air source heat pumps in their homes.

We might suggest that training in climate change issues can help coaches better understand both the professional and personal choices, along with supervision as a space to explore the fluid boundary between personal ethics and practice.

Perceived roles and responsibilities of professional bodies

The survey participants articulate diverse views on their roles concerning the role of professional bodies, with the strongest views being that professional bodies' primary role is in equipping members through training and development, along with advancing ethical practice.

Participants were cautious about professional bodies becoming involved in an issue which has become politicised and thus creating further divisions or damaging the reputation of the professional body.

Overall, there was an acknowledgment of the challenges inherent in addressing climate change within coaching. These include a lack of adequate training on environmental issues, potential client resistance, and the emotional toll of discussing this topic when views were divergent. However, the work of Davenport (2017), and others points a way forward, helping clients to develop the emotional resilience to manage the anxiety provoked by this crisis, and drawing on a range of tools and techniques, from visualisation to mindfulness, which coaches are well equipped to deploy.

The findings have provided insights into coaching psychologists' differential views and intentions. The results suggest there may be both individual and national differences in climate change issues, and the place of coaching psychology. For example, Australian respondents appeared to be more committed to developing coaching psychology as an applied discipline than any other country. Hence, support and interest in coaching psychologists may be different, and this may affect their attitudes, perceptions and intentions. However, caution is needed given the same sample involved.

It is worth noting that coaching psychologists practice across a wide range of areas from life coaching to health coaching and business. As a result, these different domains of practice may influence perceptions and practice opportunities and intentions about climate change in coaching practice. Further research is needed to examine this variation.

Alignment with Broader Psychological Literature

The attitudes and concerns expressed by coaching psychologists in this survey resonate with findings in the broader psychological literature. Clayton (2023) highlights the role of social psychology in understanding and addressing climate change, highlighting the collective nature of the problem and the social dynamics involved in perceptions and behaviours related to environmental issues. This perspective supports the view that coaching, as a relational and socially situated practice, has the potential to

contribute meaningfully to climate action. Both at an individual level and through the work of those coaching within organisations.

Furthermore, the emotional dimensions of climate change, such as eco-anxiety and feelings of helplessness, are well-documented (Davenport, 2017). Coaching psychologists, through their expertise in facilitating emotional processing and resilience, are uniquely positioned to support clients navigating these complex emotional responses.

Implications for Coaching Practice

The integration of climate change into coaching practice necessitates a thoughtful and informed approach. We believe coaches must balance their ethical responsibility to address pressing societal issues with the core principles of client autonomy and agenda-setting. This requires not only a deep understanding of environmental issues but also the development of skills to facilitate discussions that are both impactful and respectful of client perspectives. Coaching has a strong educational element, which is evident in practice (Shams, 2023), hence, coaching psychology in practice can provide a strong groundwork to understand climate change effects and related practical interventions using a psychology lens.

Secondly, we would advocate for the development of specific climate change coaching programs as opportunities for continuous professional development drawing on environmental psychology, climate science, and using approaches such as motivational interviewing as methodologies to help clients explore and overcome their ambivalence to change on climate-related issues.

Finally, we propose the creation of networks and forums within coaching for coaching psychologists and others to connect, share experiences and to foster best practices across the coaching industry.

This study is a small but further step in a new era of integrating climate change in coaching psychology literature and practice. Given the sparsity of research evidence on coaching and climate change, this small study hopefully will encourage others to engage in climate and coaching-related research.

As we previously noted, much of the work today has been conceptual and reflects interest in both coaching psychology and the wider coaching movement, with some practice actively engaging in this issue.

Our recommendations for future work is to move beyond the debate about the climate and to support coaches through the development of learning resources, tools and techniques to deliver climate change coaching effectively.

Coaching psychology as an applied discipline can provide valuable support to mitigate the negative effects of climate change on behaviour and living conditions around the

world, especially at this time of adverse effects of global climate change. However, to achieve this outcome, we believe professional bodies should collaborate and engage their members in this process. We cannot develop best practice in climate coaching without supporting the development of knowledge of the science and accompanying this with practical actions

Future research

Future research could expand upon the current survey by employing larger, more diverse samples to enhance generalisability and capture a broader spectrum of perspectives within coaching psychology.

Secondly, qualitative methodologies such as in-depth interviews or focus groups would enable richer exploration of coaching psychologists' motivations, ethical considerations, and experiences in integrating climate change into their practice.

Thirdly, further empirical research should also evaluate specific climate coaching interventions, assessing their effectiveness in fostering behavioural change, resilience, and sustainable action among clients. Moreover, exploring clients' perspectives and experiences regarding climate-related coaching could deepen understanding of the intervention's impact and practical value.

Limitations

The survey exploring coaching psychologists' attitudes towards climate change, although insightful, has several limitations that must be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the relatively small sample size ($n=45$) limits the generalisability of the results. With fewer than fifty respondents, it is challenging to draw broad conclusions about the wider coaching psychology community. This constraint is exacerbated by the demographic homogeneity observed within the sample, as the majority were white, female, and aged between 45 and 65. The lack of diverse representation—particularly the absence of participants identifying as Black—raises concerns about the inclusivity and representativeness of the survey's findings, reflecting broader issues of underrepresentation within the coaching psychology profession (Passmore et al., 2023).

Additionally, the survey employed a self-report method reliant on participants' willingness and ability to articulate their views openly. This method carries inherent risks of social desirability bias, where respondents may offer answers they perceive as acceptable or aligned with emerging professional norms rather than reflecting their genuine attitudes and practices. Furthermore, given the voluntary nature of participation, response bias may also be present, potentially skewing the results towards individuals already more engaged or concerned with environmental issues.

Moreover, the survey design predominantly utilised qualitative and Likert-scale responses, restricting the depth of exploration into underlying motivations, complex beliefs, and nuanced experiences associated with climate change. The absence of in-depth qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, limits a richer understanding of the subtleties within coaching psychologists' perceptions.

Lastly, the survey's exclusive availability in English may have inadvertently limited participation, particularly from non-native English speakers or international practitioners, further constraining the global applicability of the findings.

Conclusion

The survey provides an interesting perspective on the attitudes of coaching psychologists at a point in time where the science is overwhelming, but there remains both ambivalence and confusion about what or which actions to adopt, as well as disagreement from a vocal minority. The findings highlight a potential role for professional bodies in providing education and supporting the development of climate coaching communities, and for coaches to step forward in developing their knowledge while maintaining a client-led approach to the exploration of the issue.

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