

Protocol: Systematic Review of Group Coaching for Women’s Career Development

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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**Review Stage at time of this submission** - Formal screening of search results.

**Conflicts of interest** - None declared.

**INPLASY registration number:** INPLASY202590061

**Amendments** - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 15 September 2025 and was last updated on 15 September 2025.

INTRODUCTION

**Review question / Objective** This review asks: Among women in organisational or professional settings, what evidence exists on group coaching interventions regarding their reported effects on career development and the theoretical mechanisms that underpin these effects? The objectives are to identify and synthesise the reported effects of group coaching interventions on women in workplace settings; to examine the theoretical mechanisms through which group coaching contributes to career development; to assess the methodological quality and limitations of the existing literature; to generate evidence-informed recommendations for the design, delivery, and evaluation of workplace-based group coaching; and to highlight research gaps and priorities for future investigation. Guided by PRISMA 2020 and informed by an integrative knowledge synthesis approach, this systematic review will consolidate fragmented knowledge on group coaching as a gender-

responsive workplace intervention. Its purpose is to provide theoretical clarity, practical insights, and directions for future research, with the aim of supporting women’s career progression and leadership opportunities in organisational contexts. **Rationale** Recent years have seen renewed global attention to gender parity in leadership, yet signs of backlash have begun to surface. Surveys suggest that many men now view equality efforts as discriminatory (Ipsos, 2024), while political shifts such as executive orders under the Trump administration have sought to dismantle diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, with ripple effects across corporate practices worldwide (Aratani, 2025). Major corporations, including BP, Goldman Sachs, and McDonald’s, have scaled back DEI commitments, removing diversity-linked incentives and reversing board-level diversity requirements (Treanor, 2025). This retreat is particularly striking given the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership. Women currently hold only 11.6 per cent of CEO roles globally (Hinchliffe & Ajemian,

2025) and remain marginalised in sectors such as finance, technology and politics (World Economic Forum, 2023). This is despite evidence that gender-diverse leadership enhances innovation, adaptability and governance quality.

Barriers to women's career progression operate at multiple levels. At the societal and organisational levels, bias, discrimination and inequitable practices persist (da Silva et al., 2022). At the individual level, these forces often translate into intrapersonal constraints, such as self-doubt, identity conflicts and reduced ambition (Naseviciute & Juceviciene, 2024). The demands of caregiving, the "double presence" of home and work, and the "double bind" of conflicting leadership expectations further complicate women's leadership journeys (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). These conditions frequently lead to burnout, stalled progression or attrition from leadership pipelines.

In response, organisations have implemented a wide range of micro-level interventions, including mentoring, sponsorship, training and coaching (Ryan & Morgenroth, 2024). However, results have been inconsistent, with many initiatives criticised for focusing on "fixing" women rather than addressing systemic inequalities. Among these interventions, group coaching has emerged as a potentially distinct and promising approach (Seiler, 2025). By fostering peer learning, shared reflection and collaborative problem-solving, it may enable women to navigate both structural and personal barriers more effectively.

Despite its growing use, the evidence base for group coaching remains fragmented and conceptually unclear. Definitions vary widely from those centred on active group dynamics (Nacif, 2023) to models resembling individual coaching delivered in group settings (Mann et al., 2022). This lack of clarity risks inconsistent design, delivery and evaluation of interventions, undermining their effectiveness. A systematic review is therefore required to consolidate knowledge, examine theoretical foundations, and provide evidence-informed guidance for both scholars and practitioners.

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**Condition being studied** The condition under study is group coaching for women in workplace settings. Group coaching involves small groups of individuals working with a professional coach in a collaborative, time-limited process that emphasises reflection, dialogue and peer learning (Nacif, 2021). Unlike team coaching, which focuses on collective performance, or individual coaching, which is highly personalised, group coaching blends individual goal pursuit with the benefits of group interaction (Van Dyke, 2014; Ward, 2008).

In the workplace, group coaching has been adopted as part of leadership programmes, talent pipelines and return-to-work schemes (Filleti & Jones, 2025; Mikhaeil-Demo et al., 2024). These initiatives often aim to support women through critical career transitions, such as motherhood, or to help them address persistent gender-specific barriers in organisations (Bonneywell & Gannon, 2021). Group coaching may enhance confidence, courage, networks and leadership skills while also providing a forum to reframe systemic challenges and reduce feelings of isolation.

However, conceptual ambiguity and fragmented evidence limit understanding of its value. Questions remain about the conditions under which group coaching is most effective, the mechanisms through which it operates, and its impact on women's career development. Clarifying these dimensions is crucial, as organisations continue to invest in group coaching without a strong theoretical or empirical foundation.

This review will therefore synthesise the existing literature on group coaching for women in the workplace, with the aim of establishing conceptual

clarity, mapping reported outcomes, and identifying future research priorities.

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## METHODS

**Search strategy** A comprehensive search strategy is developed to capture studies examining group coaching for women in workplace settings. As definitions of group coaching vary and terms such as group coaching and peer coaching are often used interchangeably, a broad search approach is adopted.

The search string ("group coaching" OR "peer coaching") is applied to the abstract field to ensure that the intervention is central to each study. This string is combined with terms related to the population of interest (female OR wom?n) using the Boolean operator AND. The wildcard symbol (?) is used to capture both singular and plural forms (Booth et al., 2022).

Searches are conducted across 16 databases: Business Source Complete (via EBSCO), Emerald Insight, Gale Research Complete, JSTOR, Oxford Academic, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals Online, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer Nature Link, Taylor & Francis Online, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library. In addition, the

first five pages of Google Scholar are screened to identify further eligible studies not indexed in the databases (Bozer & Jones, 2018).

Both peer-reviewed publications and grey literature are included. Grey literature is defined as documents disseminated outside traditional academic publishing, such as theses, dissertations, conference proceedings, reports, white papers, book chapters, and practitioner-authored publications. Its inclusion is considered important to minimise publication bias and ensure a more comprehensive synthesis (Paez, 2017). No date restrictions are applied to maximise coverage and avoid introducing temporal bias (Higgins et al., 2019).

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- Higgins, J. P. T., Thomas, J., Chandler, J., Cumpston, M., Li, T., Page, M. J., & Welch, V. A. (2019). *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions Second Edition*. <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.
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**Participant or population** The review focuses on women in organisational or professional workplace settings. Eligible studies must include female participants engaged in group coaching interventions aimed at professional or personal development.

Studies are considered if they examine women at any career stage, including early career, mid-career, and senior leadership, and if they involve participants across different sectors, professions, or industries. Mixed-gender groups are eligible when women form a clear majority, defined as either all members being female or a female-dominated group in which women outnumber men by at least two to one (Wheelan, 1996). Accordingly, studies in which women comprise more than 80 per cent of participants will be included.

Studies will be excluded if they focus exclusively on men, involve mixed-gender groups in which women are not the majority, or examine populations outside workplace or professional contexts (for example, clinical, educational, health,

sports, or correctional settings not directly related to career development).

## References

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**Intervention** This review will include studies examining group coaching or closely related group-based interventions that align with the commonly accepted definition of group coaching (Nacif, 2021). Eligible interventions are characterised by a time-limited, small-group format, the involvement of a professionally trained coach who applies coaching principles and approaches through participant-led dialogue and a collaborative partnership between coach and participants, and a focus on individual goals supported by accountability, reflection, and peer learning within the group.

Eligibility was determined by the design of the intervention rather than the terminology used by authors. Programmes that primarily targeted collective organisational or team outcomes, rather than individual development and mutual support, were excluded. Only interventions delivered in workplace or professional contexts were included. By contrast, programmes implemented in academic, health, sports, or correctional settings were excluded, as these often prioritise sponsor-driven or coach-led agendas instead of participant-led goals (Campbell & Mogashana, 2024; Matthias et al., 2016; Nasir et al., 2023; Westervelt et al., 2023). Such formats risk altering the relational balance between coach and participants, which is fundamental to coaching practice (Filleti & Jones, 2025; Jones et al., 2016). Group coaching was defined as involving at least three participants. Dyadic interventions were excluded, as they do not generate the group dynamics and diversity of perspectives that underpin group coaching processes and outcomes (Nacif, 2023). Finally, only interventions directed at personal and/or professional development were included. Programmes focused narrowly on technical or task-specific skill development, such as peer or instructional coaching in education or healthcare, were excluded because they do not reflect the broader developmental orientation of group coaching (Han et al., 2023; Jones & Andrews, 2025; Normand et al., 2025).

## References

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**Comparator** Not applicable. This review will include studies with or without a comparator.



Where comparators are present (for example, individual coaching, mentoring, training, or no intervention), they will be noted, but the absence of a comparator will not exclude a study.

**Study designs to be included** This review will include empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods) as well as conceptual and theoretical papers that examine group coaching for women in workplace or professional contexts. Eligible empirical designs include experimental, quasi-experimental, longitudinal, cross-sectional, case study, and evaluation studies.

**Eligibility criteria** In addition to the PICOS criteria, studies will be included if they are published in English and available as peer-reviewed articles, theses, dissertations, book chapters, reports, or other forms of grey literature. Opinion pieces, editorials, and non-substantive commentaries will be excluded. Interventions must involve at least three participants to ensure group dynamics; dyadic formats will not be considered. Studies must be situated in organisational or professional contexts and directed at personal or professional development, rather than technical or task-specific skill training.

**Information sources** The search will cover 16 electronic databases: Business Source Complete (via EBSCO), Emerald Insight, Gale Research Complete, JSTOR, Oxford Academic, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals Online, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer Nature Link, Taylor & Francis Online, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library. Additional sources will include the first five pages of Google Scholar and grey literature, such as theses, dissertations, reports, conference proceedings, book chapters, and practitioner-authored publications directly addressing group coaching and women's career development. The broad coverage is intended to reflect the highly specific nature of the topic and the limited availability of studies, ensuring that all potentially relevant sources are captured. Where necessary, study authors will be contacted to obtain further details about the intervention or the study design.

**Main outcome(s)** The review will consider outcomes of group coaching for women in workplace and professional contexts across four domains. Affective outcomes include changes in confidence, courage, motivation, resilience, empowerment, and sense of belonging or inclusion. Cognitive outcomes refer to shifts in self-awareness, leadership identity, clarity of career

goals, and understanding of organisational dynamics. Skill-based outcomes include the development of leadership and interpersonal skills, communication, networking, and strategies for navigating workplace challenges. Career results comprise promotion, progression to leadership roles, career transitions, retention, and enhanced access to professional networks, mentors, or sponsors. No restrictions will be applied regarding timing; both short-term and long-term outcomes will be considered.

The review will also examine theoretical mechanisms proposed to explain how group coaching contributes to these outcomes, such as peer learning, identity development, or collective sense-making

By synthesising outcomes across these domains, the review aims to clarify the contribution of group coaching to women's career development and identify the conditions under which it is most effective.

**Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis** A formal quality assessment will be conducted only if a sufficient number of eligible studies are identified. Should this be possible, quantitative studies will be appraised using established tools such as the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal checklists or other appropriate risk of bias instruments, qualitative studies will be assessed using JBI's checklist for qualitative research, and mixed-methods studies with the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Conceptual and theoretical papers will be evaluated in terms of clarity, coherence, and contribution to the literature.

If the number of studies is too limited to apply these tools systematically, methodological characteristics such as design, sample size, and reporting quality will be described narratively. In either case, the limitations of the available evidence will be highlighted in the synthesis, and conclusions will be interpreted cautiously.

**Strategy of data synthesis** Data from the included studies will be extracted and coded for descriptive details such as title, year, authors, country, sample characteristics, professional sector, theoretical frameworks, and research methodology. Both empirical and theoretical contributions will be included in the analysis.

The synthesis will be guided by McGrath's (1984) Input–Process–Output (IPO) framework, widely used in group research (Ilgen et al., 2005) and increasingly applied in developmental interventions (Terekhin & Aurora, 2024). This framework offers a structured way to examine how group coaching has been designed, implemented, and evaluated in

workplace contexts and to understand factors influencing its contribution to women's career development. Inputs will encompass participant demographics and diversity, coach characteristics such as gender, training and professional background, group size, session duration, programme length, delivery mode, organisational context, and geographical location. Processes will include the purpose of the intervention, design features, themes addressed, facilitation practices, peer dynamics, and conditions that arose during delivery. Outputs will focus on reported outcomes mapped across affective, cognitive, skill-based, and career domains, including both intended and unintended effects.

Given the diversity expected across study designs, interventions, and outcomes, a statistical meta-analysis is not anticipated. Instead, the review will adopt an integrative synthesis approach (Cronin & George, 2023) to bring together findings from qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies alongside conceptual papers. This approach will enable the identification of thematic patterns, theoretical mechanisms, and methodological gaps across the literature.

The synthesis will first map descriptive characteristics of the evidence base, including how studies are distributed across time, geography, sectors, and participant groups. It will then integrate findings on inputs, processes, and outputs to develop a thematic account of how group coaching operates for women in workplace contexts. Finally, it will highlight conceptual and methodological limitations, unresolved questions, and priorities for future research, with the aim of advancing both scholarly understanding and organisational practice.

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**Subgroup analysis** Subgroup analyses will be conducted only if a reasonable number of studies are identified. Potential areas of interest include participant characteristics such as career stage (early career, mid-career, senior leadership), sector

or profession, geographical region, and intersectional factors where these are reported, for example ethnicity. Coach characteristics, including gender, qualifications, and professional background, will also be considered. Intervention design factors, such as group size, session length, programme duration, delivery format (in person, online, or hybrid), and organisational context, may be examined where data allow. Outcomes may also be compared across affective (confidence, resilience), cognitive (self-awareness, leadership identity), skill-based (leadership, networking), and career results (promotion, retention, leadership progression). If the number of eligible studies does not permit formal subgroup analysis, differences across these categories will be described narratively in the synthesis.

**Sensitivity analysis** A sensitivity analysis will be considered if an adequate number of studies are identified. This would involve re-examining the synthesis after excluding studies assessed as lower quality or with limited methodological detail, to determine whether their inclusion influences the overall findings. Where conceptual or theoretical papers are included, their contribution will be reported separately to distinguish them from empirical evidence. If the volume of studies is too limited to permit this type of analysis, findings will be presented narratively with explicit discussion of how study quality and design may affect the strength of the evidence.

**Language restriction** The search was limited to English-language studies.

**Country(ies) involved** The review is conducted by researchers in the United Kingdom, and it may include studies carried out in multiple countries.

**Keywords** Group Coaching; Gender Equity; Input-Process-Output Framework; Leadership Development; Systematic Review; Women's Career Advancement; Workplace Interventions.

#### Contributions of each author

Author 1 - Priscila Filleti - Developed the research question and review protocol, designed and tested the search strategy, and prepared the draft manuscript. Will lead screening, data extraction and synthesis once the review begins, and act as guarantor of the protocol.

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Author 2 - Rebecca Jones - Provided guidance on review methodology and protocol design, supported the definition of eligibility criteria and data extraction framework, and critically revised the manuscript for accuracy, clarity and rigour.

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Author 3 - Ruth Sealy - Advised on methodological and theoretical framing of the protocol, reviewed the search strategy and inclusion criteria, and contributed to manuscript revision, ensuring alignment with academic and ethical standards.

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