

Book review

Schema Coaching: Overcoming Deep-seated Challenges, By Iain McCormick (2025). Routledge. ISBN 9781032818740

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The publication of *Schema Therapy* by Jeffrey Young and colleagues (Young et al. 2003) has been followed by an increasing number of peer-reviewed articles on the subject (Alsubaie, 2024). However, McCormick is leading the use and communication of schema applications in coaching. As well as writing *Schema Coaching*, McCormick has contributed an overview chapter on schema coaching, (Passmore and Lynch, 2022), a series of papers on techniques (McCormick, 2024a) as well as research papers on a range of schema coaching approaches (McCormick, 2024b).

Schema Coaching is a comprehensive introduction to schema coaching based on McCormick's wide experience as a coach, and reflective practitioner. The book provides an excellent overview of the evidence for the effectiveness of schema coaching, and is a pragmatic guide to applying schema approaches, and the requirements for doing that ethically. Schema coaching is also positioned in the context of other coaching approaches.

Schema coaching, like schema therapy, rests on a model of personality – that “early maladaptive schemas” evolve from early developmental experiences and learning, which then shape and limit our response to the challenges of life. Schema coaches (and schema therapists) use a range of approaches, from CBT, Gestalt, and psychodynamic traditions in order to help clients move beyond maladaptive schemas. The consistency across this diverse range of coaching approaches is an emphasis on effectiveness.

The book is framed around what McCormick calls the “schema octagon” – leading off with case conceptualisation and schema psychoeducation and concluding with relapse prevention.

McCormick covers five coaching approaches to complete the octagon. In each he puts the approach in context, illustrates its application, provides the evidence of effectiveness and then an illuminating case study. He concludes with guidelines for applying reflective practice to relevant coaching experience.

Three of the octagon's five therapeutic approaches are categorised by McCormick as “advanced”. The two approaches he identifies as appropriate for trained coaches cover Mindful Release and Schema Challenge. These are respectively informed by the clinical literature on mindfulness-based therapy and CBT. More advanced coaching practices are Imagery Rescripting, Chairwork and

Dialogue and Emotional Exposure. Imagery Rescripting comes from a psychodynamic tradition with an emphasis on reframing or rewriting early, particularly childhood, experiences. McCormick provides a detailed guide to using this approach and references his paper (2024) on that application with coaching clients.

The challenges for the coach adopting schema coaching approaches are the validity of the schema model of personality, the relevance of the translation of clinical tools to coaching and developing the ability to apply schema assessments and treatments to their caseload of executives and other workers.

McCormick puts considerable weight on the third of these issues. He is emphatic about the need for coaches, and especially coaches using advanced schema techniques to have appropriate training, personal experience of coaching and therapy, and ongoing supervision (which he details in the “ethical eight”).

Do the clinical approaches developed by schema therapists translate to the work of coaches? Attia and Gifford (2023) make the analogy of Formula 1 technology being applied to commuter cars in explaining the relevance of a clinically derived methodology being used with a high-functioning professional. McCormick emphasises the need for coaches to ensure they are working with high-functioning clients – people with stable social lives, steady vocational status and who are psychologically well adjusted, despite the concerns that have brought them to coaching. While the evidence of how these approaches work with coaching clients is still emerging (McCormick, 2024), this seems like a reasonable assumption.

Is the schema personality model valid for the clients that coaches work with? In therapy, clients’ schema are assessed by the 18 dimensions of the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ). The Young Positive Schema Questionnaire has 14 positive schemas that are counterparts to the negative schemas of the YSQ. In their popular book on schema, Young and Klosko identify 11 “life traps” or schema (Young & Klosko, 1993). McCormick has distinguished nine negative and nine positive schema that coaching clients are more likely to be struggling with.

In a recent paper Dirzyte and colleagues (2024) correlated the 18 dimensions of the YSQ with the Big Five personality dimensions across two non-clinical populations from different cultural backgrounds. They report logical relationships between the negative schemas and the five dimensions of personality. The obtained moderate level positive relationships between neuroticism and many of the schema, along with negative relationships with extraversion and a moderate negative correlation between conscientiousness and Insufficient Self Control.

It seems that the schema described by the YSQ fit with the personality dimensions that effectively describe “non-clinical” individuals and that these schema are particularly sensitive to different nuances of psychological difficulty.

Schema Coaching is a practical book, strongly emphasising the competence coaches require in the range of schema-based approaches McCormick introduces. There is good evidence that the schema approach is valid as well as providing clients with a meaningful understanding of the origins and the implications of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. The existing empirical evidence supports the use of these approaches by suitably experienced and supervised coaches. *Schema Coaching* is an excellent resource for developing these skills.

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