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Coaching - Experiences of pluralism in a young discipline

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Keywords

experiences, discipline, coaching, young, pluralism

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Coaching – Experiences of Pluralism in a Young Discipline

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This paper explores the cross-disciplinary approaches adopted in coaching research, coaching education and coaching practice. Coaching is a young discipline which has attracted researchers and practitioners from a variety of different disciplines and professions. Focusing on coaching in organisational contexts, the paper explores the research approaches adopted in the papers published in two peer-reviewed journals dedicated to coaching research, the International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Research, and Coaching: an International Journal of Coaching Theory, Research and Practice. The paper next examines the curriculum content and pedagogical approaches in selected postgraduate coaching programs. Finally the paper looks at some of the approaches adopted by coaching practitioners and the support for an eclectic approach. The paper argues that conversations between researchers, educators and practitioners are important in taking the discipline forward, that more empirical research is needed, and that interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research would be beneficial.

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Introduction

Many established disciplines with epistemological and methodological traditions have, as noted in the call for papers for BAM 2015, adopted a pluralist approach to management research, education and practice. The choice to do so can lead to new insights, either from looking at issues from different theoretical perspectives or from adopting methodologies not common in a particular discipline. This paper explores the approaches adopted in a young discipline, coaching, which has emerged from several different disciplines and is still wrestling with definitions and approaches. As coaching seeks to become recognised as a profession, it is also tussling with issues relating to competency requirements, ethics and regulation (Maxwell, 2009a). Boyatzis and Van Oosten (2015) argue that the intellectual integrity of coaching depends on research, however the increase in popularity in coaching practice has so far outpaced empirical studies designed to test its efficacy.

In coaching, a pluralist approach is a necessity, not a choice. This paper will explore coaching research, coaching education and coaching practice. It first considers coaching research and the disciplines that inform coaching, and then explores the methodologies used in coaching research. The paper next examines coaching education, considering the curriculum content and the pedagogical/andragogical approaches used. The paper thereafter reviews coaching practice, considering coaching practice and in particular that of eclecticism, as well as coaching evaluation and coaching supervision, each of which is influenced by the disciplines and prior experience of the practitioner. Finally the paper draws some conclusions and makes recommendations.

The context of coaching for the purpose of this paper is the workplace. Hence business coaching, executive coaching, internal coaching and managerial coaching are included, however life coaching is not.

Coaching Research

Coaching research is generally cross-disciplinary in approach, with researchers applying their disciplinary background to the discipline of coaching. Most commonly, these disciplines can be categorised as those based on the helping professions (psychology, psychotherapy, counselling), those based on behavioural and social sciences, and those based on education (in particular adult learning). This has been helpful in terms of a young discipline being able to draw on theory and practice already validated elsewhere. Drawing on research from other disciplines has however partly contributed to confusion about what makes coaching a distinctive discipline and practice in its own right. Coaching researchers are influenced by their backgrounds in their choice of research questions to address, with, for example, those from disciplinary backgrounds in psychology more likely to focus on the individual impact of coaching such as goal attainment or well-being, while those from a management background may be more interesting in organisational outcomes such as improved engagement or productivity. As highlighted by Stober, Wildflower et al. (2006), coaching is at a disadvantage compared with longer established disciplines as there is as yet comparatively little specific coaching research evaluating processes and outcomes. Observational studies are particularly rare to date (Gessnitzer and Kauffeld, 2015) as are studies investigating coaching outcomes in relation to employee performance in a broad context (Kim and Kuo, 2015).

On the other hand, a clear advantage of this cross-disciplinary approach is, as Grant and Cavanagh (2007: 1) point out, that ‘the process of grappling with, synthesising and applying the information and perspectives drawn from wider fields of endeavour to the fields of coaching and mentoring, has the capacity to generate insights of great depth and richness’. Furthermore, Cavanagh stresses the advantages of being able to think across categories and to find creative and new ways of linking up people and ideas, to think divergently and to allow creative solutions to emerge. For this reason, he opposes silo thinking, and, although a psychologist himself, does not think that psychology should own the space of coaching (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2009). Bachkirova et al. (2014) warn that each ‘discipline and school of thought seems to have significantly different assumptions, not just about how to coach but even about what is worth exploring and what is not’. They argue in favour of allowing multiple approaches to enrich the knowledge base of coaching but acknowledge that this may appear overly inclusive, particularly to those educated and trained according to different traditions, and who reject approaches other than their own.

While Cavanagh and Grant (2005) accept that coaching and mentoring can generate new insights and perspectives from a specialist focus on coaching and mentoring alone, they argue that this specialisation sits within a body of knowledge related to working with people to effect change. Hence they argue that lessons learned from other related disciplines can be useful in developing theories of coaching and mentoring. In a similar vein, O'Broin and McDowall (2014) argue that research from psychotherapy is relevant and transferable to coaching. Stober, Wildflower et al. (2006) also contend that research relating to change in psychotherapy can be extrapolated to coaching. They advocate integrating the disparate knowledgebase upon which coaching draws, into a coherent body of knowledge applicable to coaching. Den Outer (2010) notes that development theories are increasingly popular in coaching because of 'their perceived alignment with coaching objectives of increased awareness, transformational learning and guiding developmental changes'.

There have been some papers comparing and contrasting coaching with counselling and therapy (Bluckert, 2005; Boniwell, 2007; Maxwell, 2009b; Price, 2009). It may seem obvious that as many coaching practices such as active listening have been applied in counselling and therapy for decades, e.g. Rogers (1957), research into the efficacy of such practices may be applicable to coaching also. There has however been little research to confirm that research findings relating to counselling are equally applicable to coaching (de Haan, 2008).

While multiple perspectives may shine new light on complex problems, integrating these perspectives is problematic. As Bachkirova and Kauffman (2008a) point out, each field of knowledge has its own traditions, perspectives and its own assumptions, and these different perspectives may sometimes contradict each other. In relation to cross-cultural coaching, for example, Plaister-Ten argues that 'the coaching profession may never agree upon a common definition and multi-disciplinary literature does little to provide clarity' (Plaister-Ten, 2009: 77). Kauffman goes so far as to say that the current state of knowledge about coaching does not yet allow integration or synthesis and that there is no 'perfect overarching or unifying theory to address the contradictions inherent in various approaches' (Kauffman, 2010b: 2). This paper next looks at the research approaches currently being used to examine and develop the discipline and practice of coaching.

Whether or not research findings related to counselling can be applied unaltered to coaching is as yet untested. However it is possible to compare the evolution of counselling as a discipline with the stage that coaching finds itself in. According to Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011), there are three key stages in the evolution of knowledge:

Firstly research tends to focus on how to define the area of study and its boundaries, and at this stage theoretical and experiential articles are common;

Secondly, researchers develop and test interventions and approaches, initially using case studies and small scale qualitative research, and later including randomised controlled trials with larger sample sizes to demonstrate impact, and then to meta-analysis. Unfortunately McDowall and Short (2011) argue that it is still difficult to conduct quantitative meta-analysis in coaching, due to the lack of high-quality studies. Grounded theory is also used at this stage to develop theory;

Thirdly, as researchers start to explore variations to established theories, quantitative methods are used as well as qualitative approaches such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore individual experiences.

Passmore suggest that coaching is in the later stages of phase 2 and argues that many of the research claims have not yet been validated by other studies and may reflect local conditions or populations. Stober, Wildflower et al. (2006) describe most extant coaching research as anecdotal or descriptive, which although it generates hypotheses and contributes to the development of theory, does not 'prove' what works in coaching or why it works. Others have also criticised coaching for a lack of methodological rigour (McDowall and Short, 2011).

Two coaching-focused peer-reviewed journals which are open to contributions from all disciplines and approaches to coaching are the International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring (IJEBCM), and Coaching: an International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice. In this they differ from journals such as the International Coaching Psychology Review, the journal of the Coaching Psychology Group of the British Psychological Society, which focuses as the name suggests on coaching psychology.

In the interest of transparency, the author declares that she is on the Editorial Board of the IJEBCM and has co-written a paper published in that journal. The author has no connection with Coaching: an International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice.

A review of all the articles, excluding editorials/forewords, interviews and book reviews, in both journals from their inception (2003 for IJEBCM and 2007 for Coaching) to end 2014, indicates a high number of conceptual papers. Figures 1 and 2 show the split between conceptual and empirical articles in the IJEBCM (excluding special issues) and Coaching respectively.

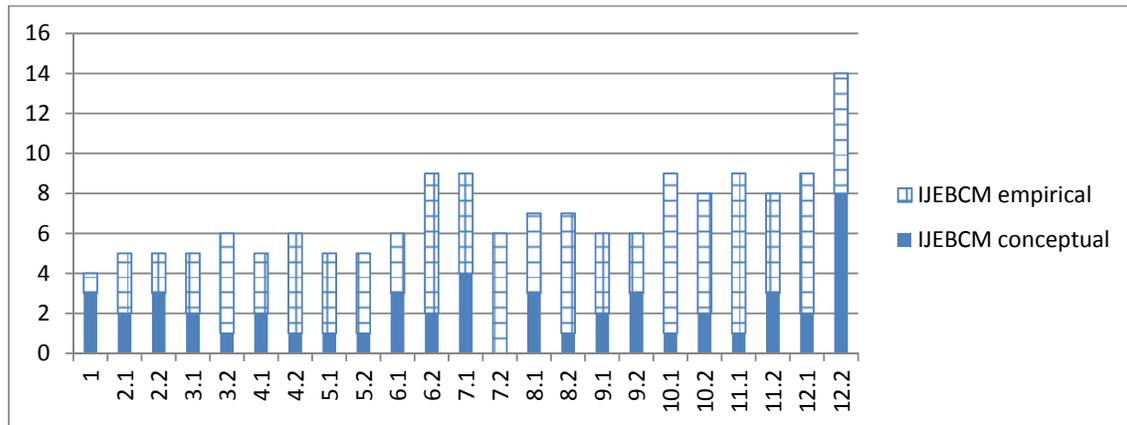


Figure 1 Empirical and Conceptual Articles in IJEBCM

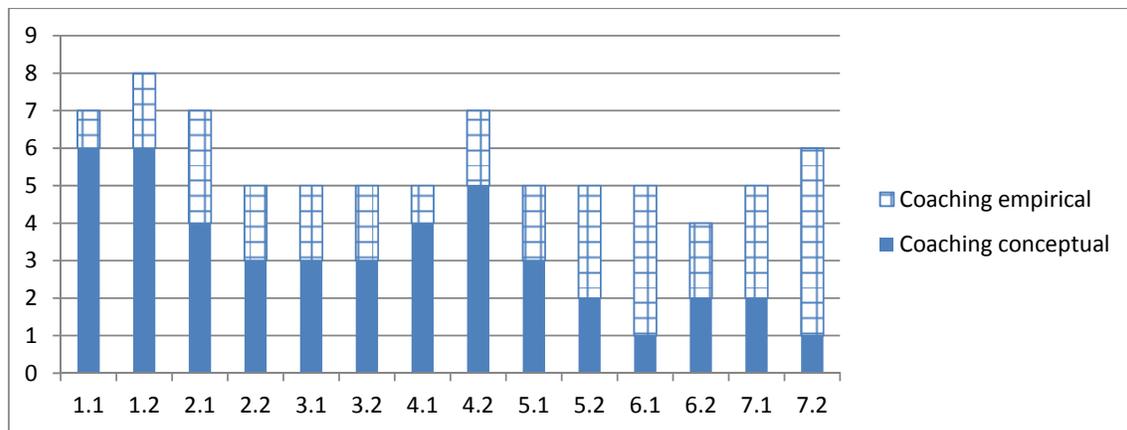


Figure 2 Empirical and Conceptual Articles in Coaching: an International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice.

As can be seen from the figures above, although Coaching began life four years later than IJEBCM, it still went through the same process of a high percentage of conceptual articles in its early years. Both journals continue to publish conceptual articles as is appropriate for this early stage in the development of the discipline. These papers are useful both to practitioners and to other academics as they summarise debates or propose models and guidelines.

In the IJEBM, empirical research is predominantly qualitative, with grounded theory, interpretative and heuristic phenomenology providing the overall framework, and interviews and case studies the commonest methods used. This is particularly the case with the special issues, most of which are from the Oxford-Brookes Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference, and are written by students of the Oxford-Brookes M.A. in Coaching and Mentoring Practice or Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring, who have been exposed to common methodology training. This is evident in the preponderance of phenomenological approaches, in particular Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, with semi-structured interviews the method of choice.

Cases studies and action research are also evident in the special issues. It should be noted however that case studies can vary significantly in different disciplines. Case studies in psychotherapy and counselling may focus on a single client while case studies in human resource management may focus on the organisation as the unit (McDowall and Short, 2012). Either might be useful in coaching, depending on the interest of the person reading the case study, e.g. practitioners may welcome evaluation of techniques at individual or team level, coaching sponsors in organisations may be interested in evaluation of programmes, while academics may be interested in theory generation and testing.

It may be that a constructivist interpretivist approach has a natural appeal to coaches who in their everyday practice are interpreting and helping others to interpret the world around them, rather than measuring the world with external benchmarks. It is also notable that the IJEBM studies using qualitative approaches generally justify them in relation to the research questions. The tiny number of experimental studies included in this journal mostly does not justify their choice of methodology, but simply describe the method used, as if its choice were self-evident.

Furthermore the choice of qualitative approaches typically includes small sample sizes. Many of the published papers have emerged from studies within the framework of a coursework masters, and hence small sample sizes are to be expected. Convenience, snowball or purposive sampling are the norm, with probability or stratified sampling the exception. A criticism of outcome studies is that they primarily rely on subjective self-reports, with no consideration of the impact on the organisation (O'Broin and McDowall, 2014). As noted above, this may be perfectly satisfactory to those whose primary interest is in the impact of

coaching on the individual but less so for those with an interest at the organisational unit of analysis.

In line with the early stages of the generation of knowledge, the journal *Coaching: an International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, also publishes a high number of conceptual papers, often from well-established academics and practitioners, whose papers are often illustrated by examples, but not by field studies.

The empirical papers published in *Coaching* include experimental designs more often than in the *IJEBM*. This may reflect the disciplinary background of the authors, often from a psychology background. These papers are however in the minority. It may be that those researching coaching from the scientific paradigm are more likely to submit their work elsewhere, e.g. the *Coaching Psychology Journal of the SIG*.

Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) argue in favour of mixed methods studies which call upon both traditions and through triangulation between qualitative, quantitative and existing research literature, are capable of developing new understanding.

Stober, Wildflower et al. (2006) also advocate the use of complementary research methods, emphasising that randomised controlled trials which are seen as the gold standard in medical research, have limitations in terms of developing an evidence base in coaching. They value the contribution of other methods such as case studies and quasi-experiments. As Bachkirova and Kauffman (2008a: 109) point out, the results of randomised controlled trials may be 'statistically significant but experientially superficial'. Randomised controlled trials are of course a valid way of investigating certain types of research questions but, as noted by Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011), are not appropriate for theory generation. Different research questions require different approaches. Choosing the appropriate method for a particular question is 'absolutely critical to bringing coaching into the mainstream of research' (McDowall and O'Broin, 2014: 2). According to Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011), the only criterion should be research excellence, in other words, ensuring that the paradigm, the approach, methods of data gathering and analysis are appropriate for the question and that valid conclusions are drawn.

Unfortunately, Bachkirova and Kauffman (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2008a) also note that researchers from different disciplines often do not communicate with each other. While it has been found that some mentors and coaches draw on other approaches as needed in their

practice (Salter, 2014), research appears to be more siloed. In a familiar echo of the sceptical reaction of authors steeped in the positivist tradition in relation to qualitative research: ‘The traditional orthodox scientific community is still reluctant to give the status of science to the interpretative-phenomenological approaches in research’ (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2008b: 111). Thus while we currently see cross-disciplinary research contributing to the development of coaching, i.e. research into coaching from the point of view of another discipline such as psychology, we are not seeing interdisciplinary research, defined as ‘research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice’ (Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research, 2004), or transdisciplinary research, defined as ‘research efforts conducted by investigators from different disciplines working jointly to create new conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and translational innovations that integrate and move beyond discipline-specific approaches to address a common problem’ (Harvard, n.d.).

An optimistic editor’s review of research methodologies for coaching and mentoring published ten years ago (Cox, 2005) suggested that the range of methods used to explore coaching and mentoring would ‘grow in complexity, depth and variety’. The reality has not yet lived up to this expectation. The published research in both these journals shows a limited range of methods applied. Harding (2014) comments on the range of methodological approaches now contributing to evidence-based coaching and mentoring research. However the methods documented in her article essentially comprise a case study, action research, and interviews.

Furthermore, the majority of papers in the two journals focus on a single perspective, that of the coach, with only a handful including both coach and coachee. Thus an obvious source of triangulation is missing. Coaches have a vested interest in presenting a positive evaluation or experience. That of the client or employee being coached may be quite different. Why is there such a paucity of research including coachees? Access is one possible reason. Coaches can be contacted through professional associations and various forums, but there is no equivalent for coachees. Coachees may be reluctant to voice criticism of an approach being championed by their organisations, and particularly so if the coach is their manager. The primary focus in the literature reviewed is on the individual’s experience of coaching. While

team coaching has been increasing, there is as yet little in the literature exploring this phenomenon, e.g. (Kets de Vries, 2005; Shipper and Weer, 2011; Clutterbuck, 2013).

Both journals, the IJECM and Coaching, welcome contributions from both practitioners and academics, thus providing a voice for different perspectives on the theory and practice of coaching. This goes some way toward overcoming ‘the old academic versus practitioner dichotomy’ which Grant (2008) argues ‘is spurious, unhelpful at best, and frequently quite destructive. A joint approach helps avoid practitioners and other stakeholders seeing research is irrelevant (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011). It also highlights the need for practitioners to be competent at choosing, using and evaluating research methods, as will be discussed below under education. The journal Coaching publishes articles on research methodology. Occasionally professional association publications do likewise, e.g. McCarthy (2011).

These different approaches to research coaching and the different disciplines whose theories are used to conceptualise coaching result in some practical difficulties. Firstly, researchers or students seeking to learn more must search a vast array of databases and portals in order to familiarise themselves with relevant background theory. Secondly, it is difficult for a coaching researcher to decide where to publish. Do they choose a coaching specific journal (niche and likely to be unranked in the various journal quality lists) or a more general journal whose scope includes various forms of interventions relating to people in the workplace. The methodology chosen will partly determine the acceptability of the findings to a particular journal. Similarly supervisors of coaching doctoral theses have to be careful to select examiners whose epistemological, ontological and methodological preferences are in line with those chosen by the candidate, or if not, that the examiner is an open-minded person who will evaluate fairly, even if the thesis is coming from a different perspective.

Coaching Education

Coaching education provides a link between researchers and practice. There are as yet only a small number of specific coaching masters programmes although a growing number of management programmes incorporate a coaching subject. The curriculum content is typically influenced by relevant theory, professional requirements, and where relevant, any national requirements (McCarthy, 2010). While there is often some common content, such as coaching theory and skills, there is also a great deal of variation, some of which is influenced

by the faculty in which the programme is located. For instance, the coaching masters programme in Sydney University is located within the School of Psychology while the Master of Business Coaching fits within the University of Wollongong Sydney Business School. Both programmes equip students with coaching theory and skills but as might therefore be expected, the Sydney University programme includes more psychology content than the University of Wollongong programme which includes coaching for strategy and innovation, as well as team coaching and cross-cultural coaching. The Master of Coaching and Mentoring Practice at Oxford Brookes University includes modules on transformational learning and adult development as well as psychotherapeutic dimensions of coaching and mentoring while Sheffield-Hallam University includes leadership, change, consultancy and evaluation. All four universities include research training within their masters, with students researching a relevant issue and writing up their findings. This addresses the recommendation of the Global Convention on Coaching that coach development programmes should include research as a core competence (Rostron, 2009) as well as the Australian Government requirement that all coursework masters students should acquire an understanding of research principles and methods (AQF, 2013). This research training enables practitioners to evaluate research evidence and its applicability to their practice, as well as the ability to continue researching as practitioners (Stober, Wildflower et al., 2006).

Participants in coaching education are typically practitioners with work experience. Participants in Oxford Brookes University's MA and Doctoral Programmes in Coaching and mentoring are usually professionals, with an established coaching or consulting career (den Outer, 2012). Similarly McCarthy (2013) describes students on the Master of Business Coaching in Sydney as mature professionals, including full-time internal and external coaches, coaching managers, human resource managers, learning and development practitioners, and a range of other professions. This diversity of experience in the classroom enables students to reflect on their own experience, to tease out the nuances of coaching in different contexts, to broaden as well as deepen their understanding. In-class discussion focus on empirical evidence for the effectiveness of particular approaches, explore ethical and business issues related to coaching, and encourage students to engage both in class and in assignments. This can lead to genuine insights and transformation of their understanding of what coaching is and how it works (McCarthy, 2010).

As Kauffman (2010a: 7) observes, sometimes coaches do not fully understand what makes their practice effective and 'are then thrilled when they discover that, unknown to them, a strong theoretical and research rationale would have supported their choice'. Coaches who were educated originally in different fields of knowledge and practice and were consequently trained according to different traditions may disagree profoundly on their philosophy and their practice of coaching (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2008a). The diversity of prior experience means that different coaches may be comfortable with different approaches to coaching (Grant, 2006). Reflecting on these differences and comparing their own practice to that of others and to what is documented in the literature allows coaches to become conscious of what is distinctive about their own practice. The students' diverse contexts and personal preferences also drive the passion they bring to their research projects.

The nature of the cohorts choosing these programmes drives the selection of appropriate adult learning techniques. Adult learning, as noted by Bachkirova, Cox et al. (2010), underpins all coaching practice. The learning and teaching approaches used in the coaching programmes mentioned are thus congruent with the content of what is being taught. Bachkirova et al. select three adult learning theories they see as particularly relevant to coaching, viz. andragogy (Knowles, Holton III et al., 2005), experiential (Kolb, 1984) and transformative (Mezirow, 1990). McCarthy (2010) supports these three and adds a fourth, Schön (1983) and his approach to reflective practice. These common approaches assure that even when theoretical content differs, students share common learning experiences, coaching each other in class and reflecting on their experience and the feedback they have received.

However the majority of coaches and coaching managers have not completed masters degrees in coaching. Indeed many coaching managers are self-taught or have only completed a short training programme, with the most common model cited the Grow Model (McCarthy and Ahrens, 2012). This can lead in the words of Popovic and Boniwell (2007) to 'newly baked professionals that cling onto techniques and tools'. The risk with limited training is that participants may feel they must rigidly follow a sequence of steps, rather than focusing on the person they are with and choosing an appropriate approach to help that person move forward (McCarthy and Milner, 2013). The vast array of tools and techniques from different disciplines may be exciting and inspirational for some coaches, but may overwhelm others who simply do not have the time to compare and contrast this wealth of potential resources.

Coaching Practice

While many practitioners may simply apply tools and techniques they have learned in their training, others do draw on a range of different approaches. This approach has been well documented by Megginson and Clutterbuck (2009: 4) who distinguish what they term 'managed eclecticism' from 'the random gleanings of coaches, who collect techniques and processes the way a jackdaw collects shiny objects'. Coaches who only draw on one or two theoretical perspectives will be more constrained than those who can draw on multiple models of coaching (Kauffman, 2010b). The ability to draw on multiple models is a measure of the maturity of a coach, according to Clutterbuck (2010). However these models and techniques should be selected and used in keeping with the philosophy from which they are derived (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2009).

How the effectiveness of coaching is evaluated also varies with the disciplinary/professional background of the evaluator. Psychologically trained coaches may rely on individual pre- and post-measures whereas industry practitioners may be keen to show a return on investment in monetary terms. From an organisational coaching perspective, whether in the context of an external coaching coming into an organisation, or an internal coach or coaching manager, the impact on the individual such as the sustained nature of change, is important. However so too is the impact on the team and on the achievement of the organisation's objectives. After all, the organisation is funding coaching and has a strong interest in a return on its investment. Life coaching can focus purely on the coachee whereas organisational coaching has to satisfy multiple stakeholders. This distinction is significant when choosing research methods to answer such questions as 'is coaching effective?' or 'to what extent is the change wrought through coaching sustained?'

Many claims have been made for the return on investment in organisations, e.g. 5.7 times the initial investment to cite a well-known study (McGovern, Lindemann et al., 2001). Such claims are often by practitioners rather than academics. Organisations are not closed laboratories with all variables controlled, hence it is difficult to argue that all improvements in a given time period are due to coaching alone. It can be difficult to attach a monetary value to the impact of coaching on specific individuals and even more difficult to attach a monetary value at the organisational level.

A coaching culture is one where employees are listened to, where ideas are implemented, where people are involved in developing and implementing strategy, where goals are set and

tracked, and feedback given. All of these lead to improvements. However at the same time, macroeconomic conditions may make life difficult for an organisation, leading to higher costs, due for example to the cost of imported raw materials, or lower sales due to the impact of exchange rates on export prices. Individuals may leave because of personal circumstances so that the organisation is still faced with the cost of recruitment and training of new employees. For these reasons, those interested in organisational coaching may find that a focus purely on the individual is unsatisfactory while focusing on organisational level changes is very challenging. McCarthy (2014) recommends that coaches and organisations agree the expected outcomes prior to commencing coaching, thus allowing an evaluation of whether or not those outcomes have been achieved. For example, some organisations might want to focus on improving communication (as measured by their employee survey responses) while others might want to improve innovation (as measured by the number of ideas or new products generated). Defining these expectations up front allows the coach to adopt approaches which research has shown to be effective in achieving such outcomes.

As noted earlier, one of the areas of focus of early coaching research was on definitions and boundaries. One such distinction is between coaching and consultants. Whereas consultants give advice from a position of expertise, the emphasis in coaching is on helping the person being coached to define their goals and how they will achieve them (Grant and Zackon, 2004). Another distinction which has attracted a lot of attention is that between coaching and counselling and therapy. In fact, a number of attempts to define coaching have done so by explaining what it is not, e.g. not training, mentoring, counselling or psychotherapy (Boniwell, 2007). The focus here is not about practitioners defending their turf, but rather about a genuine concern about some practitioners venturing into territories outside of their known discipline, if they lacked self-awareness or did not have the right skills or knowledge (Salter, 2014). A coach with no training in counselling should simply refer clients to a qualified counsellor if counselling is what the client wants or needs.

A tricky boundary to negotiate is that relating to mental ill-health. Some clients present for coaching, when in reality they need support for mental ill-health. In fact, Grant (2009: 97) reported that between 25% and 50% of those seeking coaching showed 'clinically significant levels of anxiety, stress, or depression.' Furthermore, even if the coach were qualified to provide counselling or therapy and felt this were in the client's interest, they are under contract to provide coaching. However Price (2009) found that although practitioners believed that coaching is different to therapy, it nonetheless appeared from his survey that

many coaches were in fact engaging in therapy. To do so, if they are not competent to do so and not employed to do so gives rise to serious ethical, moral and potentially legal questions (Maxwell, 2009b). It could be argued that what is important is not so much for coaches to have training in counselling or therapy, but training in how to recognise the symptoms of mental ill-health and whether or not coaching is appropriate at this point in time. In other words, as Buckley (2007: 21) declares: ‘All the coach needs is an ability to make clear, effective, ethical and legal judgements as to the efficacy of coaching with this particular client’.

The different disciplines which inform the theory and practice of coaching also differ in relation to supervision. The form of coaching appropriate for business coaching is not universally agreed. After all, managers and consultants do not have supervisors in the sense of an experienced practitioner with whom to reflect on their practice. However therapists and counsellors do and it is this clinical model which currently dominates the supervisory requirements of professional coaching associations. Salter (2008) suggests that the context in which coaching is applied and individual coaching styles should be taken into account when deciding on the need for supervision. There is agreement that some form of supervision and professional development would be good for the profession and for individual practitioners (Hawkins and Schwenk, 2006; Hawkins and Smith, 2006; McGivern, 2009; Whyte, 2013). It would also provide some quality assurance for purchasing organisations, which could be valuable in an unregulated evolving industry (Maxwell, 2009b).

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the pluralist approaches evident in coaching research and practice and identified some of the problems inherent in pluralism.

It is perhaps ironic that coaching, one of whose purposes is to help others to join the dots and make sense of the world itself suffers from a fragmented approach. The Global Convention on Coaching in Dublin in 2009 was an attempt to have a conversation about coaching, to weave together the different strands. However more conversations like this are needed, not only in the printed literature but in two-way or multi-way conversations including academics, practitioners and trainer/educators. Just as coaching students learn more about their own practice by comparing with others, so too can coaching researchers and educators learn from

comparing their approaches in an open-minded way with researchers and educators coming from different paradigms.

More observational studies and longitudinal studies would be useful in unpicking the many variations which appear under the common label 'coaching'. More studies from the coachee perspective would also add value. If we wish to demonstrate the benefits at an organisational level, coaching could learn from studies conducted in management or HRM disciplines. Hence both mixed methods and cross-disciplinary research will continue to add value to coaching in the years to come. Moving from cross-disciplinary to interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research would be a dramatic leap forward in terms of the development of coaching theory and practice and both the discipline and the profession would be richer for it.

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