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# Sharing the research journey - developing research skills in a Coaching Masters Program

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## Publication Details

McCarthy, G. (2012). Sharing the research journey - developing research skills in a Coaching Masters Program. Western Business Management Conference. France. 5-6 October

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# Sharing the research journey - developing research skills in a Coaching Masters Program

**Abstract**

Powerpoint presentation presented at the Western Business Management Conference, France

**Keywords**

sharing, program, research, journey, developing, skills, coaching, masters

**Disciplines**

Business

**Publication Details**

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## Sharing the research journey – developing research skills in a Coaching Masters Program

Dr Grace McCarthy

W B M 2012 / Paris

## Outline

- Context
- Research Method
- Perceptions of Confidence and Competence
- What made the difference:
  - Students' own efforts
  - Support of other students
  - Support of staff
- Students' Key Learnings
- Link to Theory
- Conclusion

## Context

- Master of Business Coaching, Sydney, Australia
- Experienced coaches and managers
  - Average age 40+
- Part-time only – Friday/Saturday format
- 7 face to face days for research subject
- Applies principles of adult learning from
  - andragogy (Knowles)
  - experiential learning (Kolb)
  - transformative learning (Mezirow) and reflective learning (Schoen)
  - Development of course outlined in McCarthy (2010)

## Business Coaching Research Paper

Students are undertaking a coursework masters and are nervous about research

- Our Coaching Research Paper incorporates a strengths-based (positive psychology) coaching approach (Linley, Seligmann):
  - Collaborative
  - Listening and Open *non-judgemental* questions
  - Constructive Feedback
  - Students' coaching skills help their research skills
- Contributes to
  - Self-Efficacy (Bandura)
  - Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci – competence, relatedness and autonomy)
  - PERMA (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Positive Relations, Meaning, Accomplishment – Seligman Well-Being)
  - Thinking Environment (Kline)

## Assessment

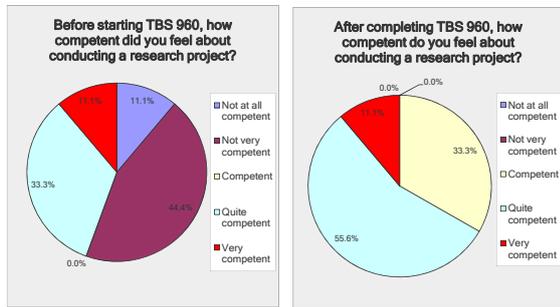


- Staged assessments
  - Research Proposal (inc. application for ethics approval) 30%
  - Presentation of draft findings 15%
  - Research Report (inc. ethics completion report) 55%
  - Initial and interim presentations not assessed
  - Marking criteria and grading guidelines (rubrics) provided at start of subject
- Formative feedback
  - On each assessment and on non-assessed presentations
  - And informally to each student individually
- Summative feedback
  - On each assessment

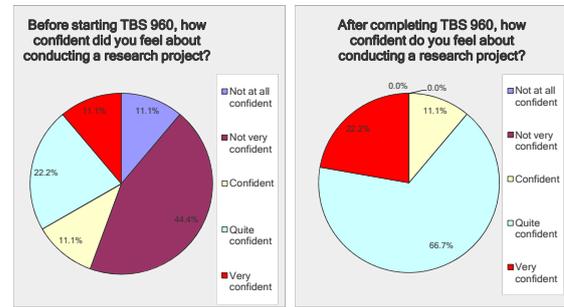
## Research Method

- Online survey post completion of the subject
  - After results were declared and time for appeals passed
  - Ethics approval from UOW Human Research Ethics Committee
- 10 students in 2012 cohort
- All 10 completed the survey
- Mix of closed and free text questions

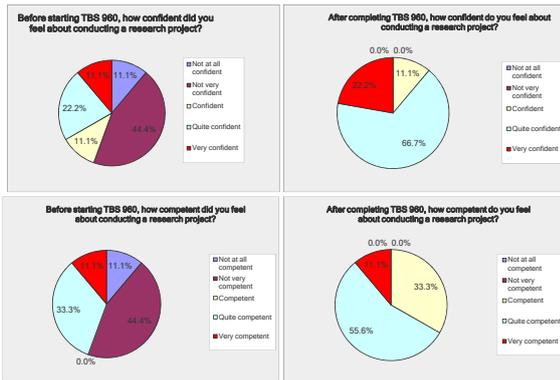
## Perceptions of Competence



## Perceptions of Confidence



## Clear Increase in Confidence and Perceptions of Competence



## Perceptions supported by Performance

- Overall marks ranged from 66% to 85%  
Mean 78%
- Assignment 1 Research Proposal Mean 77%
- Assignment 2 Draft Findings Mean 75%
- Assignment 3 Research Report Mean 78%
- Increase in mean mark for critical analysis from 70% in Proposal to 85% in report
- Increase in mean mark for linking findings with literature from 64% in draft findings to 75% in report

## What led to the difference: Student's own Actions/Decisions

- Most highly ranked:
  - Being able to choose their own topic
  - Choosing a topic that mattered to them personally or professionally
  - Learning by doing the research project
  - Learning from feedback on each assignment
- Free text comments
  - "The research project provided additional motivation to learn from the project rather than completion of another subject of study. Selecting the research topic was an essential element that added value for myself and was a far greater motivator than workplace scenarios, group work and presentations that are provided as exemplars of industry practice. This was real."
  - "Textbook was very helpful."

## What led to the difference: Support of Fellow Students

- Most highly ranked:
  - Support in refining research question
  - Support in refining interview or survey questions
  - Helped with motivation
- Free text comments
  - "This group has an extremely high degree of respect for each other, valuable industry experience and willingness to help each other. The facilitation of presentations and group work in developing and evaluating the research project greatly contributed to allowing everyone to provide their perspective and ideas."
  - "Our group has been a constant source of inspiration and support for me."
  - "I have sought to make a strong contribution to the program, our group and my own learning and have found a great level of support from my colleagues."

### What led to the difference: Support of Staff

- Most highly ranked:
  - Lecturer's belief in the value of my topic, in my ability to succeed and positive response to my presentations
  - Support of lecturer in refining my research question and survey/interview questions and obtaining ethics approval
  - Clear marking criteria and grading guidelines
  - Constructive feedback on assignments 1 and 2 in time to address in assignment 3
  - Constructive feedback on assignment 3 and offer to help with publishing findings
- Free text comments
  - *"The support of my lecturer and suggestions throughout this process have been invaluable."*
  - *"I have made good use of the SBS library through this research project and had excellent support from the librarian."*

### Students' Key Learnings in Their Own Words

- *I have the ability to undertake research.*
- *I have the desire to undertake further research.*
- *I have greater confidence through the process of adult learning and support from my lecturer and fellow cohort*
- *Keep the topic simple - the goal is not to "set the world on fire" but to learn the process of research*
- *This was an interesting process where I was challenged by my own assumptions at the commencement of the research*
- *Even though I thought my topic was precise, the results provide unexpected information that takes you in other directions - you have to let some things go or take them up as a separate research topic.*
- *Ethical issues in research such as perceived power in an employing organisation and potential bias in questions were new learnings.*
- *The whole idea of conducting a failure case study was new to me and most of my colleagues.*

### Students Continue their Research Journey

- Some of the ten students in 2012 are applying to start research degrees in 2013
  - Only constraint is availability of staff to supervise
- Some are drafting journal articles and one a conference paper based on their findings
- The students are considering publishing their papers collectively as an eBook

### How Findings relate to Theory

- Choice of topic relates to autonomy, meaning (Perma) and authentic assessment
- Support of fellow students links with relatedness (self-determination theory), positive relations (Perma) and thinking environment
- Importance of lecturer's belief in topic and positive response to presentation links with Perma, thinking environment and self-determination theory
- Importance of marking criteria, grading guidelines (rubrics) and constructive timely feedback fits with assessment theory (e.g. Boud) and with Perma (accomplishment)
- Increase in confidence links with self-efficacy, self-determination theory and Perma (engagement, positive emotions and accomplishment)

### Conclusions

- Developing research skills is about more than technical skills
- Creating a positive environment with positive support from staff and fellow students enhances motivation for current *and* future research
  - Requires some academics to re-think their automatic responses
- Choice of topic is important for adult learners
- Self-efficacy is important for motivation and developing competence as well as confidence
- Clearly articulated requirements ensures shared understanding
- Staged assessments with prompt constructive feedback motivates students to learn

### Practitioner Research Matters

- Good quality ethical practitioner research is important
  - It focuses on matters practitioners identify as important
  - It adds to the knowledge base
  - The knowledge base will grow more quickly than if research is confined to academics
  - Particularly important in young disciplines
  - Research is seen as relevant not abstract or remote from 'real life'
- When students see the relevance of research to their professional practice, they are more likely to continue accessing and conducting research as practitioners, becoming
  - Lifelong learners
  - Partners with academic researchers
  - A community of practice to enrich our learning and teaching

### Some ideas for further research

- Conduct before and after surveys
- Replicate approach with research degrees and with other academics
- Follow progress of students who have completed this research subject and continue to research degrees
- Compare coaching approach to research supervision with mentoring approach
- Compare individual and group research supervision
  - numbers applying for research degrees is increasing every year, apprenticeship model is resource intensive



Et Merci à Tous!

### Any questions?



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