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Editorial

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This special issue of the International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring comprises articles produced by postgraduate students following their presentations at the 6th Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference, held at Oxford Brookes University on 7th April 2010. The conference is held every year and provides an opportunity for postgraduate students to share their research into coaching and mentoring with a much wider audience.

All eleven papers in this bumper issue discuss the use of qualitative research approaches and explain the appropriateness of particular designs for studying coaching and mentoring. There are five papers that describe phenomenological approaches, two that discuss grounded theory methods and two that present a case study. There is also one paper that explores a narrative research approach and one that examines issues associated with the use of action research at doctoral level.

The first paper is by Ines Kretzschmar and is entitled “Exploring Clients’ Readiness for Coaching”. In this paper Kretzschmar employs a grounded theory methodology to collect her data. The review of literature was delayed until the theory began to emerge and then treated as another form of data for testing and refining the emerging theory. Findings confirm that clients’ readiness for coaching is a multi-layered and complex concept that is influenced by a number of enabling and hindering factors that are discussed in the paper. Kretzschmar concludes by presenting a ‘Coaching Client Readiness Model’ that can be applied in practice for discussing readiness issues both with clients and with organisations.

In the second paper, Tanya Prescott asks ‘Why is Progress a Controversial Issue in Coaching?’ Prescott argues that despite increasing global debate on what progress means, the question has not been asked in relation to coaching. A heuristic phenomenological research design was used to explore dilemmas that coaches face when dealing with the phenomenon of progress. Prescott used metaphors to illuminate the experiences of a range of changes from executive, life and community coaching contexts. The three significant themes that emerged from the study are discussed, namely the determination of what progress means in the coaching relationship, the identification of indicators of progress, and the nature of coaches’ experiences of progress.

The third paper by Simon Machin examines the nature of the internal coaching relationship. In this paper Machin describes the results of a phenomenological study into the nature of the relationship between in-house coaches. The study presents three case studies of coach-client pairs and finds that trust is of paramount importance, since it facilitates in-depth challenge by the coach. The findings are compared with research from the counselling field.

Next, Karen Wesson’s paper ‘Flow in Coaching Conversations’ is a grounded theory exploration that draws on data collected from fifteen coaching clients and twenty-seven coaches. Wesson’s results describe how individuals experience flow during coaching interactions and a model has been developed that suggests how various factors might interact to produce conditions most conducive to flow.

The fifth paper by Ann Griffiths examines coaching and spiritual values in the workplace. In the study Griffiths uses an interpretative phenomenological approach and looks at links between coaching and spiritual values through the coach’s perspective. Data was collected from seven coaches through semi-structured interviews and from previous research using meta-ethnography.

Findings suggest the importance of the coach's own spiritual journey when working in this context and that the characteristics associated with spiritual values are desirable in the workplace as well as being possible contributory factors to the longevity and resilience of an organisation. A 'Spiritual Helix Coaching Model' is presented as a possible guide for coaches working in this area.

Our sixth paper is by Mike McLaughlin and is a phenomenological study of the effect that knowledge of Human Givens has within executive coaching. The research focused on the experiences of six executive coaches who had employed some of the Human Givens ideas in their coaching practice. Findings suggest that Human Givens ideas could usefully inform coaching practice, but that they should not ultimately define it.

The next article by Birgit den Outer uses a narrative inquiry approach to study coaching and cross-cultural transitions. In the paper den Outer explores the use of a narrative inquiry approach as a research method for researching coaching practice. Seven international students studying at a UK university business school related their experiences of living in the UK and how it affected their perspectives of themselves and their meaning-making processes. The article addresses three issues: the purpose narrative inquiry can serve in coaching research; the pitfalls of a narrative inquiry approach and whether narrative inquiry can be useful in showing up cultural bias in developmental theory.

The eighth article is a case study carried out by Glenn Wallis, which looks at how a blended programme of development and coaching might produce sustainable change. The research was undertaken with a group of senior leaders at a wholesale bank in the United Kingdom. Using a case study approach, the research gathered data from a number of sources in order to track changes both during and post intervention. The findings suggest that changes did occur and that learning and the influences of the programme lasted six months beyond the end of the programme.

In the next paper, John Simpson asks in what ways coaching contributes to effective leadership development. The paper examines the contribution that coaching makes to the development of the quality of leadership in one case study organisation and is based on eight semi-structured interviews of senior leaders in the organisation. Findings describe how coaching is contributing more to the development of personal qualities, personal skills and behaviours of individual leaders than it is to team building and strategic thinking.

Our penultimate paper is by Annie Symes. In the paper Symes looks at how a phenomenological methodology supported her research into middle managers perceptions of engagement in coaching and concludes with insights on how to take coaching forward to middle manager level.

In the final paper, Janice Cook explores collaborative action research and the significant ethical challenges this can pose. The article includes a model for developing a coaching theory from researching individual practice; important reflections from the early stages of a collaborative action research study and a model for creating a strong ethical environment for potential use by other practitioner researchers when using action research methodology.