

Editor's Overview: Research methodologies for coaching and mentoring

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August 2005

This issue of the International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring includes papers presented at the first Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference held at Oxford Brookes University at the beginning of April 2005. The conference was aimed at emphasising not only the results of specific research projects but also, equally, the research methods being employed. This issue is doubly important, therefore, and illustrates the diversity of evidence-based research currently being carried out in the field.

Susan Blow's paper, the first in this issue, describes a qualitative study designed to explore whether coaching strategies can help experts share their expertise. The study uses a phenomenological approach for both the collection and the analysis of data. The analysis is particularly interesting since it uses the phenomenological approach advocated by Moustakas (1994). Blow follows this process in fine detail in order to realise the validity of her data.

The second paper explores how mentoring in the community sector impacts on the mentor. Tony Evans presents a survey undertaken with mentoring schemes in the UK. Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data that was then analysed using a grounded theory approach that allowed themes to emerge from that data.

Mel Leedham's paper, entitled 'The Coaching Scorecard', presents a mixed-methods study that helps shed light on the issue of evaluation. The study includes a small case study carried out with purchasers of coaching within a large UK corporation and the results are then compared with a much larger number of questionnaire responses from coaching clients from a range of organisations. The advantages of a mixed-methods approach are evident in the study, providing a greater level of reliability than evidence from a case study alone.

Peter Jackson's paper provides a very nice example of the use of coding to interrogate interview data and attempts to provide an answer to how we might describe coaching. After explaining the deficiencies of current coaching definitions, Jackson presents a full account of the iterative coding and analysis process that he carried out during his research in order to arrive at a typology of coaching that could eventually be used to inform future research and evaluation. The compound analysis he describes becomes a research method in itself.

Iona Boniwell's work on time perspectives synthesises results from a number of studies, again illustrating the robustness of using mixed methods approaches. Borkan (2004) has expounded the virtue of mixed methods studies, confirming that they provide an opportunity for synthesis and provide additional perspectives and insights

beyond the scope of single techniques. These elements are evident throughout Boniwell's paper.

The final paper in this issue was not presented at the Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference, but is included here as an example of a study carried out from a positivist perspective, rather than the interpretivist perspective indicative of the previous five papers. Kristina Gyllensten and Stephen Palmer's study employs a quantitative methodology, describing a quasi-experimental approach to prove a specific hypothesis. Their investigation of whether workplace coaching can reduce stress is then analysed from a positivist perspective.

This is an important issue of our journal because the papers presented here demonstrate clearly the range of methodological approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, interpretivist and positivist that can be used to investigate coaching and mentoring problems. As research into coaching and mentoring progresses I predict that the range of methods used to explore the topic will grow in complexity, depth and variety, so providing even more exciting insights into an even wider array of coaching and mentoring issues. Watch this space!

References

Borkan, J. (2004) Mixed Method Studies: a foundation for primary care research, *Annals of Family Medicine*, Vol. 2, No. 1 pp.4-6.