

Editorial: Making the implicit, explicit: Delineating theoretical influences on coaching and mentoring.

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One of the pleasures of being involved in professional coaching and mentoring is the development of the discipline at such a fast speed. Mentoring, as a field has a more established tradition of research and publication than coaching. Even though the first mention of coaching in a peer reviewed paper, as far as we can tell, dates back to 1937 (Gorby, 1937), the field of coaching as a distinct area of practice and study is still quite young. Happily, it is growing and changing as only young fields can!

This youth represents both a difficulty for practitioners and an enormous strength. It is a difficulty in that, compared with other areas, there are far fewer fora in which practitioners and researchers can access up-to-date coaching specific research and articles. On the positive side, this is changing with more publications, conferences and professional coaching associations being developed worldwide.

One of the hidden blessings bestowed on coaching by its youth and lack of established academic tradition is that professional coaching is forced to draw on a wide range of cross-disciplinary theories and practices. Coaching and mentoring are change methodologies that seek their inspiration and evidence base in a host of areas, including education, psychology, action learning, health, philosophy, business, and conflict resolution.

Drawing on such a wide cross-section of the body of human knowledge means that in coaching and mentoring there is always something new to learn; some new area to be explored, or some new perspective to be understood. Importantly, 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. For this reason, it is great to see researchers linking the different bodies of knowledge that underpin coaching and mentoring. This issue focuses on these links.

Action learning has long been used as a change methodology within organisational settings. Indeed the coaching and action learning processes both are concerned with the dynamics of change within unpredictable and complex systems. The first article in this edition, from Vicki Vaartjes, explores the process of integrating action learning into executive coaching. Vaartjes's paper outlines the conceptual foundations of action learning, and then highlights the centrality of relationship in the coaching process. It is not always easy to keep coaching engagements focused on producing genuine business outcomes, but clear articulation of theoretically-grounded models greatly assist the process as the case studies in Vaartjes's paper shows.

The clear articulation of the theories that inform models of coaching and mentoring is central to the other papers in this issue. For example, Dave Peel's paper is a very useful contribution on the significance of behavioural learning theory to the development of effective coaching practice and address common concerns about the behaviourist approach to coaching.

The theme of theoretical analysis is continued in the article by Jennifer Irwin and Don Morrow on the Co-Active coaching model. The Co-active model has been a commercially successful and popular coaching model. In accord with many popular coaching models, the co-active model was not originally presented as being explicitly grounded in the broader and established knowledge base and was presented in an atheoretical manner. However, the Co-active model has much to offer, and Jennifer Irwin and Don Morrow present an interesting theoretical analysis of the model. Such analyses are vital if we are to further develop and test popular coaching models and do much to help the development of coaching as an established and validated change methodology.

The last theoretical paper is by Elaine Cox and Patricia Dannahy and discusses the use of non-violent communication (NVC) as a process to facilitate communication. The use of Internet based communication processes is increasing and the use of virtual communication methods in mentoring and coaching presents a new range of challenges. Chief among these is miscommunication. This paper presents a fascinating overview and analysis of NVC, and the conclusions presented are of use to all coaches and mentors.

Finally, this issue includes a new practice-focused section for coaching case studies. Whilst large- scale randomised controlled studies are often held as being the gold standard of research methodologies, case studies have much to offer as a fundamental method of furthering our understanding of the realities of the coaching process. In this issue two case studies present Team Manager coaching and Group coaching, and provide useful information on the management of successful coaching engagements.

The papers in this edition help to make the implicit explicit. By explicitly drawing on, and applying cross disciplinary theories and practices to the field of coaching, the authors in this issue help us to understand what it is that we do when we coach from a range of perspectives. They also help us to understand that coaching and mentoring are not stand alone processes of change, informed and underpinned solely by specialist coaching or mentoring knowledge. It is easier for us to talk about what we do (and start to see what we do) as a special field of endeavour, using insights not found in other areas.

It is true that coaching and mentoring are areas of specialisation, and the greater intensity of focus that is implied by specialisation does yield important insights and perspectives. However, it is also true that as coaches and mentors we fundamentally work with people in order to effect change – this is true of a host of specialty areas of knowledge. One of the strengths of the papers in this issue is that they seek to apply and test the insights and learnings drawn from the experience other disciplines to the context of coaching and mentoring.

Surely, the application and evaluation of past experience to present challenges is the definition of life-long learning.

References

Gorby, C. B. (1937). Everyone gets a share of the profits., *Factory Management & Maintenance* 95: 82-83.