

EMCC Group X Discussion Paper

Bridging the Gap between Practice and Research: A dialogue between members

Authors: Olson, P O; Harding, C; and Diederichs, M.

Abstract

This paper is based upon the work of the EMCC 'X' research group, which has included a series of mini-discussions from which we present two of the emerging themes, viz. conceptual confusion and practitioner development. The second method is content analysis of 'things people read, write or learn', using as input: number of coaching vs mentoring groups on LinkedIn plus keyword counts from Amazon, tables of content from Amazon 100 category bestsellers, EMCC annual conferences, international coaching psychology conferences and articles in the International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring.

It is argued that academic research misses important practitioner needs and we conclude with some recommendations for both academic research and practice theory.

Originality/value of the research (max 50 words)

Mini-discussions and content analysis are both emerging methods that might be used for further research. The group contrasts practitioner perspectives (working in a commercial context with whole persons) with an academic mission (studying aspects or models with a view to generalisation).

Keywords (max 5)

Coaching, mentoring, practice theory, research gaps, recommendations

Introduction

In 2013 a group of enthusiastic coaching and mentoring practitioners, some of whom are also researchers, responded to the EMCC call for volunteers to bring their different experiences and perspectives to form a discussion group and explore ways to bridge the gap between practice and research. Six of us from five different countries had never met, but came together in a variety of virtual environments under the leadership of Paul Olson, now EMCC President in Norway, to engage in lively debate.

In reality our geographical distance, time zones and busy schedules meant that our lively debate was punctuated by periods of silence. This paper reflects our dialogue and just some of the themes raised in our dialogue. Our intention in this paper is to both inform and provoke the reader, in the same spirit in which we informed and provoked each other within our group.

We commence by outlining the approach that we took to develop this piece of work, followed by the outcomes that were most specifically related to two emerging themes: (i) contextual confusion and (ii) mentor/practitioner development. We conclude with a summary and some suggestions on how our work could be taken forward.

The Provocation

The group were asked for some initial input in their views on the gap between coaching and mentoring practice and research. Milana found conceptual confusion, as we use different words to describe the same things and we use the same words to describe different things. It was not only semantic, but also theoretical and paradigmatic dissonance. Matthias argued the need to ‘connect the scientific and the more pragmatic side’ – in our first dialogue he clearly acknowledged inherent and necessary differences in approach. Magdalena referred to ‘the geography of CBT, NLP, creative thinking’ – she saw neuroscience (her doctorate) as integrative. Paul was hopeful that it could help us get rid of old baggage in psychology, which has too many theories and therapies.

And then we nodded when Colleen stressed the need for researchers to learn from practitioner experiences. But then we realised that it isn’t quite as innocent as it might sound – the word experience is more like a knife that cuts into the nature of why coaching and mentoring is needed. We asked ourselves: Where do we stand on these issues?

Do coaching and mentoring conferences give enough to make me want to come?

Has the quality of coaching and mentoring improved because universities have become involved in teaching it?

Is it perfectly possible to do great coaching purely with common sense and no coaching courses? Should we start to talk about coaching as a category of attributes, like we know that a car can have three wheels, one seat, no luggage room and a very small motor, but still be a car? What makes practitioners accept something and reject something else?

Do we think there is something that practitioners should be doing, but don't?

These were just some of the discussions from our initial dialogue before we developed an approach to go some way to resolving our issues.

Methods

The first discussion between group members identified our various perspectives on the gap between practice and research, which could be categorised in three ways.

First, the gap reflects the limited amount of evidence-based research that is published, compared to our lived experiences as coaches and mentors

Second, the gap reflects a challenge in respect of research paradigms. One of the most obvious gaps between research and practice is to do with experimental control. In an experimental setting you follow the protocol even if you know it will fail – in field research both context and judgment must be made explicit as part of the outcome analysis. The problem with popular quantitative methods is that you normally can only find what you're looking for. Factors that you have not included will show up as unexplained variance, while the model shows significant relationships that together account for a small portion of the variance. Tweaking a complex world into models, hypotheses and controlled experiments is generally difficult with practitioners who get money for results. Practitioner research is typically accused of lacking rigidity and control; yet their defence can be correct that real life situations demand complex interventions based upon intuition and not handbooks.

Third, the gap reflects the issue of measurement. We concluded that research leaders should acknowledge that both quantitative and qualitative research should be used in practitioner research e.g. Cone (2001), Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2008), and Charmaz (2006). By comparison, when psychoanalysts objected to outcome measures saying that a protocol interferes with the nature of unconscious processes, it was a valid objection. But a minimum measurement was still possible for practitioner research e.g. a tally of complaints before and after therapy. The number and intensity of complaints should be reduced towards zero, and the speed of improvement can easily be compared (and yes, psychoanalysis is slow).

We therefore decided to approach our study in two ways, firstly by engaging in a qualitative dialogue and secondly by quantifying some of the coaching and mentoring outputs reflected in the popular literature and academic journals and conferences. We approached the quantitative element by undertaking some analysis of the following:

- Tables of contents for the top 100 Amazon bestsellers when searching for ‘coaching and mentoring’ as at 9 Oct 2013, of which only 50 were relevant
- Keywords from articles published in the *International Journal of Evidence-Based Mentoring and Coaching*, published since 2013
- Titles of papers from the international coaching psychology conferences hosted in the UK 2007-2013.
- Titles of papers from EMCC annual conferences 2011-2014 (added after the workpaper).

This analysis was performed using the software package KH Coder by Koichi Higuchi (2013), which includes the Stanford University POS (Part-of-Speech) taggers and the R statistical package. Using first the three-words-left POS algorithm, we could then use various tools such as KWIC (Key Word in Context) and semantic covariation. A workpaper was released by Paul for review on 11 April 2014.

The second part consisted of mini-discussions via our LinkedIn blog, which could be downloaded by a Javascript to a text file for content analysis or Word for detailed analysis as appropriate. The intent of this was also to gain experience with new ways of analysing and capturing blog contents; and to perform mini-discussions feeding into an overall work paper. Technically this has worked well and could be used on a larger scale.

Findings from content analysis

Table 1 Frequency of keywords from content analysis

Frequency of nouns and verbs:	Amazon 100	IJEBCM Keywords	Coaching psychology	EMCC Annual conferences
Coach, coaching	407	192	245	86
Mentor, mentoring	24	55	-	27

The content analysis pointed to the following themes, which were also reflected in many of our discussions:

Coaching books dominated those on mentoring for the top 100 bestsellers on Amazon on 9 October 2013.

- Papers at coaching and mentoring research conferences and in the IJEBM journal are dominated by coaching over mentoring to a very large degree. Mentoring was also often used in the context 'coaching and mentoring' rather than alone.
- In coaching psychology conferences mentoring has not been a topic. KWIC shows that the word coaching was mostly connected to 'psychology' or 'psychologist' i.e. with evidence base in psychological disciplines.
- Multi-dimensional scaling showed possible clusters for problem-solving vs. developmental approaches across coaching and mentoring.
- For mentoring Dominguez & Hager (2013) similarly document different frameworks: developmental, learning and social theories. Mixing mentoring and coaching, problem-solving, learning and personal development into one grand theory does not seem like a good idea. Instead we suggest that focusing on practice areas would bring researchers closer to practitioners.

The above clearly indicates a degree of 'social construction' still going on within coaching, while perhaps mentoring is taken for granted as 'something else'. There is a good deal of research to say that this division must for practitioner research be regarded as cultural rather than universal.

In the next two sections we highlight extracts from the dialogue between members that contributed to our findings. This discussion paper is meant to consolidate the outcomes so far and perhaps lead the way for future research, perhaps using more rigorous approaches. We present here the more dominant themes from our discussions and the content analysis, firstly 'conceptual confusion' and, secondly, 'practitioner development'.

Conceptual Confusion

We now present just some of the dialogue between members that reflects the conceptual confusion around coaching and mentoring and which highlights the gap between practice and opportunities for further research. In order to reflect the dynamic between perspectives and experiences we publish the dialogue almost in full.

Paul

I have a creeping suspicion. Coaching and mentoring is really consensus and common sense AND we actually NEED it to be that way.

Take the enormous popularity of NLP, MBTI, SMART and GROW. All have scant construct validity. Half of NLP has scientific evidence that it doesn't work, i.e. not even to placebo level. NLP provides a safer identity than CBC, although CBC is more advanced. I also suspect practice shows that NLP accounts for less than 50% of what NLP practitioners actually do. But we should not forget that NLP is still being fought by psychology as snake oil i.e. psychologists created their own enemy so to speak. They even fought positive psychology - do psychologists have a fascination for problems instead of solutions? In coaching psychology this is our conclusion - coaching psychology is applied psychology but needs to stand on two feet. We struggle with the transition from psychotherapy to the new paradigm. Psychodynamic theory is not useful for healthy people: the very assumptions are invalid for coaching.

MBTI does not differentiate between helping extroversion and selling extroversion, which we know is

an enormous difference in social behaviours. If it were really a Jungian foundation - but I see no need to revert to a psychology of the 1930ies that was exotic even then - we would need to accommodate the basic assumption of 'the collective unconscious' but also give 'the unconscious' a much bigger role in theory. [...]

GROW is ok but so simple that it is of little use in most situations. The idea behind algorithms is that there are categories of problems that it solves - it demonstrates the usefulness of systematic thinking, but has in itself limited applicability. Its attractiveness might well be the catchy name.

SMART? A good amount of research shows that motivation and goals theory combine with neuroscience and behavioural analysis. The idea is solid, even if not all goals should be made specific. The biggest problem is that goals are seldom just for yourself, you may be mistaken about what really counts. Accumulated, SMART coaching can create more problems than it solves.

Like therapy we do not need coaching continuously, there will be a reason. This leads people to think that the trigger is pain, anxiety, problems, or choosing amongst opportunities (perhaps in that order).

We lack a scientific paradigm, I think. There must be reasons why the Human Potential Movement became accepted by academia only after Rogers, Perls and Ellis created completely novel explanations for psychotherapy. Then we discovered that sensitivity training is harmful. It all took us from a vague base of face validity to a sense of 'what works for whom, why, when and by whom' in the eighties - thirty years after Paul's (not me) famous challenge in the early 1950ies.

So I have a suspicion that coaching and mentoring is a nodding industry, while the key word should be construct validity. Could the scientific promise be: 'proving that we understand why coaching & mentoring works?'

What are practice areas anyway?

What is more useful: a hammer, a screwdriver or a Swiss knife? Right, we don't know until we know the challenge. Unlike consulting and mentoring where you offer your knowledge, experience or wisdom; coaching has been dominated by techniques and tools being applied on a diversity of problems. Bandler has gone so far as to say that psychotherapy is ridiculous and inefficient, all you need is NLP. In the US there is a trend towards asking for relevant experience in addition to coaching tools, globally this is pervasive to the extent that customers don't really care what you're calling yourself. Yet this moves coaching closer to consulting again, with coaching techniques just a new tool in the hands of consultants.

One way of specialisation is to choose a practice area that builds upon your background as well as a well-defined market need. What would these practice areas look like? What do you see as market trends?

For instance, do the following make sense:

1. Performance and goals coaching
2. Developmental and existential issues (incl. life coaching)
3. Health/stress/well-being (incl. life coaching?)
4. Career navigation, students

5. Executive and leadership
6. Organisational/systemic?

And how do you know when you're out of depth?

In the Sherpa survey (2014) there is a distinction between life coaches, business coaches and executive coaches. As people have identified with either as a practice area, why would you call yourself a business coach rather than an executive coach? Or vice versa?

Milana

It is not easy to provide a good classification of coaching, and I must say that I saw many of them so far, but none of these seemed quite clear. The main problem is the consistent criteria for classification. Whether it is the aim of the coaching - e.g. development/performance and skills, target group - e.g. executive/leadership/team coaching, area of life - career/business/health/etc., who is the coach - peer/manager-as-coach/etc., or the primary approach you use - cognitive behaviour/transactional analysis/existentialist/solution focused/etc.

Paul, I believe that your classification is useful and practical...and not too difficult to remember.

I agree with Paul's remarks about the requirements for work/life experience of the coach other than coaching skills, and I agree with coaching coming closer to consulting. In my experience, in their search for solutions, business clients were happier with this complementary approach (consulting and coaching) than with "pure" coaching. It might have something to do with the pressure to deliver results, but it might also be related with the culture (SE Europe). The focus of the educational system was not the process of individual critical thinking, but rather the results (or the knowledge of facts). As I'm writing this, I understand that it would be very interesting to explore the cultural differences in terms of openness and readiness for coaching among e.g. individualistic and collectivistic cultures, but also among cultures with strong and young democratic traditions (e.g. Western and Eastern Europe).

Colleen

For many years I did not concern myself with the definitions of coaching and mentoring as I believed that the most important thing was for the individuals involved in the relationship to discuss and agree their expectations and boundaries, and therefore it did not matter how they were defined or classified. This works fine for dyadic relationships.

However, when working in an organisational context and when commissioning coaches and mentors to support staff on development programmes, I have found it important to be much clearer at the start on some definitions so that people know what they are engaging in, albeit that what they do or discover together may not meet the original criteria. We actually make a conscious effort to include both coaching and mentoring on programmes, with the coach helping people to look forwards in terms of their careers and aspirations and the mentor being someone who has 'been there and done it' and then the coach stepping back in to support blocks, barriers etc. That is a bit simplistic, but that is where we start.

However, I have undertaken research within the organisation (Harding, 2006) where such support is

provided in different contexts and those involved cannot agree on what they think coaching and mentoring are in practice as it is different for each of them - one study worked with sports coaches, learning technologists, and those in skills development for example. The only definition on what was agreed was the Parsloe and Wray (I think) definition of 'helping people to become the person they want to be'.

Later my doctoral study (Harding, 2013) showed that coaching and mentoring provided a 'transitional space' for those experiencing change where they achieved similar things, but in different ways, for example:

Support for Future Focus - vision (coaching) and inspiration (mentoring)

Support for Role Challenges Implementation - both coaching and mentoring provided support for performance (not typical in mentoring), advice (not typical in coaching), and exploration

Support for Psychological Challenges - tailored to the individual, reinforcement, reassurance (coaching) and nurture and support (mentoring)

Support for Time Challenges Forward Momentum - focus (coaching) and motivation (mentoring) - if you are interested you can find out more in the published article (Harding, 2013).

That is a long way of answering Paul's really interesting question about what specialised practice areas might look like and whether in fact any of them are coaching or mentoring, rather than consulting for example. Maybe the answer is that it still does not matter what they are called, but rather what they achieve is what matters and how it was achieved and if it was through the use of coaching or mentoring skills, techniques or behaviours, then isn't that where we make our link between practice and research? Someone sets out to do something; they achieve it through the use/practice of tools, techniques, behaviours; we have an evidence base on which to tell the story of what happened, which becomes our research; and that then informs policy, practice, business cases etc to invest more in such support in the future.

Hence there is an important link between practice and research. However, it may be that philosophically we are not looking for the right answer when we talk about the link between practice and research, only evidence of experiences and impact to inform future practice and development of coaches that helps to support individual and organisational business cases for future investment. That is where it is important that we undertake more qualitative research, albeit there is also value in continuing to undertake some positivist research that tests some of the hypotheses that come out of other studies, such as the continual reinforcement of Kram's work.

Magdalena

Really agree with Colleen here in terms of organisational context but as a coach myself I can see the need for specialism as direct and specific as interviewing for senior executive roles for women and broad practice that says wellness.

Paul

Great stuff emerging here. Milana agreed that my 'practice areas' make sense, while Colleen says they don't matter because our task is to provide transitional space. I agree with both ...

Yes, good point about organisational vs dyadic space; and yes, maybe we shouldn't talk about a gap between practice and research, but talk about evidence. It resonates with practice theory vs academic theory - with practitioner research you study what practitioners actually do to formulate theory. If they deviate you ask why e.g. I don't think NLP practitioners can always use NLP. Practitioner research would find that they don't always use NLP, while academic research on NLP will of course find that they do...

Practitioner Development

We now present just some of the dialogue between members that reflects the issue of professional development in particular opportunities for mentors and mentoring research. In order to reflect the dynamic between perspectives and experiences we publish the dialogue almost in full.

Paul

Practitioners must follow trends [or they lose out in competition]

Like birds flock together it makes sense to be part of something bigger. We become part of groups: on LinkedIn we found 8,908 mentoring groups (words: mentoring, mentor, mentors) and 16,088 coaching groups (words: coaching, coach, coaches). And we become part of movements. Because mentoring groups seem more concentrated geographically, they may be more likely to pre-exist as physical groups. In coaching this seems much more competitive with gurus and coaching groups trying to create global followings and earn big money.

What do people read? There was a dearth of mentoring books in the Amazon top 100 bestsellers on coaching and mentoring, so if mentors don't read mentoring books, how do they learn and develop?

Actually we don't know if they read mentoring books, only that they are not in sufficient numbers to reach Amazon 100. It would be interesting to explore more statistics and for different languages. Yet we speculate that mentors are different than coaches. While the word coach is considered a professional identity, mentoring is something that you do on top of your other identity and expertise. In charities, universities and larger corporations mentoring tend to be internal programs for both cost and social reasons, while this is different for the majority of coaches who are 'solopreneurs'.

As commented by several members, mentoring is not driven by techniques but supposed to come naturally. What if mentors tend to prefer conferences within their own area of expertise, which is not mentoring? Mentoring means reputation and respect from 'having been there and done that' – it is in this capacity that they mentor, not because they are experts at using tools.

We asked 'what do EMCC X members treasure on their bookshelves?' The results showed that there were little in common except a Megginson or Clutterbuck, plus one or two general handbooks. While all had a mixture of coaching and mentoring books, books from outside the field were as likely to be mentioned as treasures e.g. within cultural mentoring, leadership theory, or performance issues.

Paul

Think of the thousands engaged in Linked In groups on coaching and mentoring. Allowing for overlaps we can safely assume that there are hundred thousands or millions in the

mentoring and coaching group worldwide, and presumably you will find additional groups using local languages as the above are mainly in English.

1. This enormous interest is not reflected on Amazon 100. My guess is that mentors learn via in-house courses or from each other. There is little fuss about certification i.e. no must-reads in the 'coaching and mentoring' category. Maybe also more about young people, expertise or geographically bound. If you are a mentor for young lawyers or SME's or students, the books you read are probably just different from coaching.

2. My guess is that mentors go to industry conferences for learning about mentoring than to the EMCC Annual conference. Mentors are also more inclusive of different backgrounds (ref EMCC) and certification isn't seen as necessary to earn money.

Are these fair assessments?

Milana

Yes, my impression is that mentors focus their development on the specific type of their expertise rather than on mentoring skills. At least in my region (SE Europe), mentors are established professionals in their field, and the mentoring role is of secondary importance. There are no mentors as a specific profession (unlike coaches). And this (almost) exclusive focus on expert knowledge and skills usually create a challenge for implementing mentoring schemes within the organisations, as mentoring candidates don't know much about how adults learn.

On the other hand, coaches are almost exclusively focused on coaching skills and tools. I often hear that these skills and tools are so generally applicable that there is no need for context specific experience.

To put it very extremely - coaches often learn coaching and don't bother with the content of the coaching, while mentors focus on the content and often don't bother with the process of mentee's learning.

This interpretation is in line with the findings that Paul gave.

Colleen

I must admit that in my organisation we have historically focused our attention on selecting people as mentors who we think have the right qualities and experiences and then having a light touch conversational briefing about what we hope to achieve as an organisation through mentoring. We have done it light touch as we didn't want to patronise these people who had been hand-picked and because we knew that mentoring happens informally too. However we have found that the mentee experience is sometimes not as good as we would have hoped and where it has been set up more informally there is a challenge of making the time. Historically our approach has been to provide professional coaches, qualified, accredited, in supervision etc as we are aware of the potential psychological risks of coaching.

To bring this up to date, we are now offering a formal coaching and mentoring programme within the organisation to build our internal capacity, confidence and competence and quality of internal provision. Those who are aspiring to become internal coaches have more compulsory elements on their part of the Programme, which includes supervision, but the mentors do not. Interestingly the

mentors are asking for more support and are enjoying the opportunity to reflect on their practice, so we have set up a group for them to share practice, rather than supervision.

So yes your comments are fair I think Paul, although our e experience shows I think that where we have provided more opportunities for internal mentors to develop themselves, they have been asking for more of what we are providing the coaches too.

Mentors of course sometimes use coaching skills and techniques as part of their toolkit, but that is a different discussion!

Paul

OK: I like that. Mentors are established professionals with a good amount of common sense and relevant experience. Colleen's remark about 'asking for more' seems to mean that mentors want to learn about coaching but they mostly not because they need it to be effective? Perhaps for mentors those coaching techniques are nice-to-have and not need-to-have? Maybe a couple of week-ends and role play is all they need for coaching skills?

Fran

Although it seems as if most places see mentors as knowing their jobs and having their skills, which, it assumed makes them qualified to foster development in others. It is true then that there is little work being done, and little attention being given to the ability of these individuals to relate to their mentees, to listen attentively, and to be alert to the needs of their mentees? It is assumed that this comes naturally?

Magdalena

To me a mentor is someone who has been there and done it; has insights that are part of tacit knowledge they can express and share with another and is willing to do so. Of course some can do this superbly well and some think they can when in reality we get what Colleen mentioned in some mentoring pairings. To me mentoring is an art. However, I strongly believe that a real expert provided they satisfy the above conditions - will make a good mentor without needed training because their own excellence has been the result of meticulous mindfulness in their practice. And in that mindfulness they have created more degrees of differentiation for the various aspects of their craft or trade and even if they are not that good at telling it/sharing it well because they are not grounded in learning theory etc, a mentee can equally get the answer out of a generous mentor, although it will take longer.

So to me perhaps what is common to coaching and mentoring is that two parties get together, know what the terms of engagement are i.e. mutual expectations and then work to a goal which is many ways is the same: success/learning/progress etc. Where I feel coaches differ from mentors is that mentors have confidence from the fact they have been there and done it whereas coaches often don't. This also is what makes mentors sometimes blind to alternatives and gives coaching a massive advantage. Also in my mind and experience many mentors share the information and the process is purer towards the mentee. Many coaches 'use' their clients learning to mentor themselves. Some of this is of course to be expected but I sometimes really get upset when I see people who coach who are neither expert nor seem to display good non-directive coaching. But then again the value is and

always will be, in the clients coming back and this is where I have massive faith in all the systems. Effective mentors and coaches are in demand through word of mouth. And that reputation comes from many clients saying they have been able to get results with those people so whatever their toolkit is - this helps validate that their tool kit works.

If combined with supervision group and 1:1, reflection and sharing of practices, both mentors and coaches develop their craft and improve over time but again the more mindful they are about their improvement area, quality of that, etc the more there's a chance they will improve. So for me this comes down to mindfulness training. As to number of books etc. books are just one way to learn. Observational and experiential learning which the brain can't help but do constantly will in my view be paramount over books which suffer from a specific form/layout/content and structural restrictions that may not work for all. Does any of this help at all Paul? I can write you more about organisational results for each if needed but your question seems broader.

Matthias

I agree to the comments above. Mentoring itself is not in my focus - if I start thinking about it, I would put it like that: In Germany, as far as I can see, mentoring models are: helping young professionals to get into the job. Expertise is the main criteria to choose mentors - combined with some passion for the job of mentoring. Mentoring is used in trainee programmes to step aside the young professionals so that they feel welcome in the organisation. Most mentoring approaches are without any professional learning programmes. You do your best to support others, but you will not be trained for this specific job. In the trainee programmes I know, the mentors became some rough introduction about the expectation concerning the role. In many organisations I know mentoring is like having a new well-sounding title - not always appreciated by the mentors.

Learning is mostly managed just by doing - sometimes there are internal mentoring meetings, where the mentors share their experiences.

Paul

Very valuable input and we seem to have a few points of agreement:

- * The role of mentor is based upon both self-perceived (volunteering) and accepted expertise.
- * Mentoring is in most countries considered to be relevant mostly for people low on experience such as young people, students, trainees.
- * We have evidence that listening, emotional intelligence and coaching skills are useful for mentors, however much they are experts in their fields or how senior they are in leadership.
- * We probably also agree that many coaches rely on techniques, a focus that is frowned upon by mentors. David Clutterbuck shared his experience in the e-Mentoring conference that coaches are often embarrassed in his courses when they are told to depart from their learned techniques and start to share their experience. Maybe because they are in fact short on relevant experience as Magdalena and others point out; while the opposite could be generally true for mentors: heavy on experience and common sense on technique.

My own experience is shallower. I have mentored and coached small groups, but I thought I could learn best practices by volunteering in a program that was in its 9th year for international top-of-class MBA students (China, Thailand, Kazakhstan, UK, US, Sweden, Norway and I think South America). It had been designed by an ICF MCC and we were about 20 mentors and 20 students (aged 25-35) handpicked and matched. I enjoyed the mentoring sessions but found the plenary sessions rather lacking in quality. By and large I can confirm Colleen's experiences: experience isn't enough to mentor and coaching skills are not enough to lead a mentoring program.

In our respective countries mentoring is believed to be primarily for people low on experience i.e. trainees, on boarding, or students. For the more senior mentoring is more likely to be called consulting.

Summary

EMCC VP of Research Po Lindvall, hoped for "unexpected and innovative ideas" to surface. Rather than brainstorming marketing ideas or using systematic or critical literature review, we chose a third and almost impossible option, viz. looking for gaps from different perspectives. The materials so far have been put together using a traditional thematic approach with mini-discussions and contributed topics listed under each of the headings. We also include a tentative summary of findings from the content analysis.

Our approach leads to a circular rather than linear analysis; in fact "High-level perspectives and concerns" later became the result of our 'mini-discussions'. At the point of writing this – perhaps inevitably and at least common for emergent methods – it does not yet feel like solid research, indeed it isn't.

Definitions are important because they contain assumptions about what goes on in practice; how practitioners adjust to particular contexts. Classifications should be research rather than stakeholder driven, yet taking practitioner views very seriously. For instance it is difficult to see how executive coaches can be effective if they lack leadership AND management experience. Executive coaching is not just any coaching of executives (Olson, 2008) and the necessary research definitions/assumptions are not covered by the universal definitions for coaching and mentoring such as *"to help and support people to manage their own learning in order to maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be."* (Parsloe & Wray, 2000):

There is tension between the research world looking for similarities and principles, and the commercial world looking for competitive advantage and usefulness.

We have found academic theory to be fragmented. One of the group members lamented snobbery among researchers, leading them to dismiss valid practitioner viewpoints or being uninterested to engage with practice theory proper. Practitioners more than researchers must be grounded in context and offer a credible solution – evidence-based practitioners do their best and should be acknowledged for it. They should be studied on the basis of what they actually do and why they do it. Above all they should be encouraged to use measurements and evidence into their own practice (e.g. Cone, 2001).

The group does not find much support for a clear dichotomy between mentoring and coaching per se. The dichotomy is present as practitioner groups, however.

Some skills and practices are obviously general and span all practice areas (listening and reflection skills, giving suggestions, explaining what you're doing, planning and checking goals, working with personal issues etc), but for practitioners the context and person in front of you has to be your proper focus. Research need to counter the marketing goal of creating intellectual property and amass audiences for basically similar products or even vaporware.

The bridge might be an increased focus on where practitioners spend their days, namely in specific contexts and dynamics. Ideally, the geography of coaching and mentoring will then become clearer and we can more easily provide answers to "what works for whom, when, and why".

A bridge here is wholly dependent on dialogue and tolerance, but should be very well suited for supervision.

Future Practice and Future Research

When challenged, we defend our belief system until its dominance yields and the winners prevail (Kuhn, 1962). In coaching and mentoring no paradigmatic shift should be necessary. Instead cultural awareness, dialogue and co-construction should suffice – yet we must realise that the Western world is not culturally inclined towards dialogue but rather towards discussion and competition.

Perhaps we should ask the same question as Paul (1967) asked of psychotherapy: "*What treatment, by whom, is most effective for this individual with this specific problem, and under which set of circumstances?*" (p. 111).

Academic research should

- Cease to treat mentoring and coaching as if they were entirely different, or entirely the same
- Provide awareness sessions (master classes) for evidence based theories
- More weight to meta-perspectives, less celebrity self-admiration

Practitioner research should

- Teach ways to document cases (qualitative) and coaching results (metrics)
- Be humble and learn from practitioner experiences (contextual, expertise)
- Not be too rash on designs or biased towards self-marketing
- Use supervision to reflect on practice, but also as a chance to build more evidence into your practice

Conferences should

- Put more effort into using practice areas as streams
- Provide more working space at conferences
- Have small studies in poster sessions and have increased focus on systematic and critical research (people are travelling a long way for this)

Courses should

- Teach pure reflective skills in addition to frameworks
- Sideline tools and techniques that don't have acceptable evidence and be clear about why this is necessary for the benefit of professional development

The EMCC objectives build on two premises: (1) Research can help mentors and coaches improve their practice; and (2) Practice can inform research through dialogue. Removing the ‘can’ would complete a bridge – but can we verify that this will be the case? Whenever somebody proposes a solution, it makes sense to ask: “What is the problem that this solution is expected to solve?” Implementing the wrong solutions will produce change only with the best of luck.

Coaching and mentoring deal with complex issues that are often ill suited for research with clever models, control groups and controlled interventions. Action research could be one promising strategy for practitioner theory. Generally, coaching and mentoring can use a systematic set of interventions to elicit context-relevant responses, or a pragmatic approach to assessments (e.g. Cone, 2001). Reflective notes on your own practice using evidence, theory and your own tested experience as sounding board should be used to prepare for peer and formal supervision alike.

Of course, any practitioner research risk being frowned upon by academic researchers, but is very likely to actually inform practice precisely because it is more realistic. And published or not, merely knowing that you are evidence based will be a great tribute to your professionalism.

EMCC X Group Members

Paul O Olson, President EMCC Norway (Group leader)

Dr Colleen Harding, UK

Matthias Diederichs, Germany

Dr Magdalena Bak-Maier, UK

Professor Fran Kochan, USA

Milana Malešev, Serbia

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