

Editorial: Research and Theory: The Lifeblood of an Emerging Profession

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The inaugural volume of the *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* “marked a defining moment in the history of coaching” (Cox & Ledgerwood, 2003, p. 4) because of the recognised need for evidence-based research on coaching and mentoring among practitioners and academics. While coaching has had a rich history in practice and interest in coaching has increased considerably in recent years, the necessity of grounding the practice of coaching in scholarship to enhance the credibility of coaching as it emerges into a profession has also been acknowledged.

The hallmarks of becoming a profession often involve the establishment of an empirical knowledge base, minimum industry-wide skill sets, and regulatory compliance regarding entry into the profession and maintenance and measurement of the skills that define the profession. According to Grant and Cavanaugh, many of these hallmarks rely largely upon “the development of a shared body of applied knowledge that forms the foundation of coaching” (p.8).

This second volume of *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* depicts the progress that is being made in the professional practice of coaching in the journey to becoming a profession of coaching. The maturation process within the coaching industry is illustrated by a focus on current research and theory, which Grant and Cavanaugh have conceived as the “life blood of an emerging profession” (p. 16).

Grant and Cavanaugh’s article provides an appropriate organizing framework for this volume. The purpose of their contribution is to offer a comprehensive review of the literature on coaching and they identify a number of challenges that must be met in the development of a coherent body of coaching knowledge, in particular defining and delineating what is meant by coaching, elaborating on the theoretically grounded approaches to coaching, and developing an empirical literature base on coaching.

Following Grant and Cavanaugh’s contribution, both Hannah and Peel extend the research literature on coaching within multiple contexts. Hannah’s phenomenological case study examines the impact that workplace coaching has on developing individual level competences and performance improvement among customer service employees within the U.K. Rail Industry. Further Hannah establishes the link between workplace coaching and customer service satisfaction among the travelling public. She concludes that workplace coaching may be an appropriately effective approach to improving individual and organizational performance when coaching is placed within a vocational qualifications framework. Her research extends the literature base on workplace coaching and suggests that there may be a payoff for organisations to invest in developing the skill levels of their employees through workplace coaching interventions.

Similarly, Peel acknowledges the virtual absence of research into the effects of coaching in mentoring in Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and develops an agenda for research in this setting. Peel's case study research on SMEs within the securities sector in the United Kingdom suggests that organisational behaviour, in particular, culture, must be at the core of coaching and mentoring strategies within the context of SMEs. The findings of this study extend research on coaching and mentoring within SMEs, stimulate further research on the selection of tools and techniques to augment coaching and mentoring within this context as well as evaluating the effects of such approaches.

The final two contributions in this issue examine coaching as a reflective process and one that positions coaching as a tool for facilitating genuine and effective dialogue. Each contribution draws upon distinct theoretical approaches that extend our understanding of coaching. Conceived as largely a reflective process, Jackson reviews the concept of reflection in the coaching practitioner literature and draws upon constructivist theories of learning and psychology to inform the development of a model of the mechanism of reflection in coaching. The aim of this article is to establish more firmly the importance of reflection in the coaching process and provide practitioners with support and guidance on enhancing the practice of coaching.

Finally, Stalinski's contribution, "Leadership Coaching as Design Conversation", firmly grounds the concept of leadership coaching within general systems theory, organisational learning, and dialogue practice. Her conceptualisation of leadership coaching as design conversation serves as a catalyst to integrate several domains of understanding that theoretically ground coaching, as well as enhancing the professional practice of coaching.

Several themes among the contributions to this second volume emerge for the reader. The most significant of this scholarship is the implication that the services that leadership and personal development coaches seek to provide their clients is not limited to a specific, narrow market. While case studies highlight coaching practice in the UK, the contributions from the U.S. (Stalinski) and Australia (Grant & Cavanaugh) demonstrate that theory and practice for professional coaching transcends geographic boundaries. Likewise, Peel notes that most scholarship and theory traditionally emphasizes the large organization, however, his contributions draw attention to SMEs, which have been identified as significant components of economic growth within the UK and by most western governments. All contributors to this volume appear to address the issue that leadership is for everyone, regardless of formal role or organizational position. Stalinski presents the view that leadership is a practice, rather than a position, a perspective also reflected by Peel, Grant and Cavanaugh, and Hannah. Further, the skill sets and mental models of effective leadership can be learned and developed, from self-awareness and reflection, as discussed by Jackson, to the importance of cultural and organizational awareness, as emphasized by Peel.

In summary, the articles in this volume underscore the importance of establishing solid theoretical foundations in the behavioural sciences, the psychological sciences, as well as the integration of understanding from a broader organisational perspective, including the human sciences and the systems sciences for the practice of coaching. This issue contributes to this effort significantly, by highlighting both theoretical foundations as well as their application, through relevant, descriptive case studies. Further, many of the contributions call for additional research that continues to contribute to the development of

a solid base of literature on the practice and impact of coaching that is grounded in scholarship.

Lastly, Stalinski suggests that a design conversation is called for that stimulates genuine dialogue among multiple stakeholders in the coaching industry to develop a “comprehensive vision of ideal practice in the coaching profession” (p. 76). Such contributions to research, theory, and the practice of coaching would enable coaching to progress into a respected trans-disciplinary profession, which practitioners and academicians believe is the natural evolution being advocated within the coaching community. This volume of *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* provides a solid foundation for practitioners and academicians to build upon in the journey to become a profession.