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Editorial

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This Special Issue of the International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring comprises articles based on student conference papers presented at the 7th Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference, held at Oxford Brookes University on 20 January 2011.

This is our fourth Special Conference Issue and so offering students of coaching and mentoring the opportunity to publish their work has become somewhat of a tradition. To students in many other disciplines, the Master's dissertation is the end point of the study trajectory; to be aware of the existence of other students' research topics and their interesting findings, was solely the prerogative of supervisors and moderators. Equally, the opportunity for Masters students to engage with an audience about their research project is a relatively rare occurrence, for completing the degree can feel a little anti-climatic and insular. The Oxford Brookes University Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference is therefore a popular and well-attended annual event with many students taking the opportunity to present their work and the IJECM is proud to provide a further platform for early-career researchers in the field, as well as for newly established evidence-based practitioners, to disseminate their research findings to a wide audience of experts, academics, and alumni. In fact it complements our ultimate aim of developing and sharing knowledge, and establishing good practice for the relatively young discipline of coaching and mentoring.

The overall high quality of the diverse research articles emanating from the conference should have something of interest to practitioners, academics and students alike. This special issue starts off with three articles that take a coach's perspective.

The first article by Linda Spencer reports on a phenomenological study of the experiences of seven professional external coaches. The coaches were working on combined training-coaching leadership development or management skills programmes. The findings suggest that coaching supports training transfer, but not necessarily in the ways that established transfer models predict. The coaches' interpretation of their role had a significant influence on transfer effects, and synergistic results emerged from combining training and coaching. The study serves to inform coaching practice and contribute to a more effective programme design.

The second article that takes the coach's perspective is that by Tricia Brady on clients' issues of self-esteem. Another phenomenological study, Brady's research aims to understand the real-life experiences of six executive coaches and their clients with issues of self-esteem. Four key findings emerge: in 'contracting' meetings, self-esteem is rarely the presenting issue; coaches find themselves operating somewhere between coaching and therapy; the process of coaching self-esteem requires the client to embark on a courageous journey of transition; and the coach's 'unconditional positive regard' creates an environment that allows clients to generate their own self-esteem.

Again from the coach's perspective, Nigel Sargent's article describes what happens in a coaching conversation when an executive is at risk of derailing. Based on the semi-structured interviews with five coaches, Sargent presents the key professional attributes a coach needs in the situation of derailment, provides a summary of the wider systems implications a coach needs to be aware of, and discusses suggestions for appropriate strategies and interventions.

Continuing with particular coaching issues and leadership, Gill Reynolds explores the meaning of coaching to six newly appointed senior leaders in their transition period, in the private and public sectors. The findings reveal that participants attributed particular significance to their coaching in helping them overcome a deep sense of vulnerability in the face of complex challenges, develop new personal, social and cognitive capacities, and identify new purpose and meaning in their lives as a whole.

The focus of this Special Issue then shifts towards the organisational perspective with Tomas Misiukonis' project on middle managers in Lithuanian corporate organisations and their beliefs about, and experiences of, organisational coaching and their own coaching practices. The article presents findings of interest to middle managers and those providing coaching training alike.

Again through the lens of the organisation, Geraint Evans looks at culture to illuminate the relationship between a coaching programme and the consequent changes within a scientific services unit (SSU) of a UK county police force. A case study is used to create a detailed description of the changes in behaviour of managers and SSU staff and the consequent shift in the organisation climate, practice and culture. The findings suggest that management behaviour influenced the organisational climate and contributed to an environment that changed the way members of the SSU related to each other and the divisional aims. Furthermore, the study highlights the way individuals make sense of the coaching programme and outcomes and surfaced the paradox of using person-centred non-directive coaching for explicit directed organisational change.

Then follow two articles on team coaching, starting with Mona Haug's. This explores the relationship between coaching interventions and team effectiveness. The author looks at a 'cross-functional' team preparing the launch of new product with the aim of demonstrating the potential for tailored coaching interventions in relation to organisational outcomes. Although the overall methodological framework was collaborative action research, a number of different data collection methods were used such as semi-structured interviews, pre-test and post-test questionnaires, participant observation, individual and group feedback, and a researcher's diary. Vera Woodhead's article presents a case study of a small team in an NHS setting to explore the effect of team coaching on team working. The study provides a detailed insight into the specific attributes that make team coaching such a powerful intervention to improve team working. The findings demonstrate that team coaching supports team working in a number of interwoven ways and that seeing and understanding the human person behind the professional mask was a significant element in gluing the team together.

Also in the area of health, Alison Shearsmith's article presents an exploration of holistic life coaching for breast cancer survivors using a phenomenological mixed methods approach that includes action research and semi-structured interviews. The aim of the research was to explore the possible introduction of coaching interventions to the breast cancer care pathway in the context of the notion that cancer patients recover more fully through a more holistic approach. Three cancer patients with different backgrounds participated in the study. Findings demonstrate coaching as a successful intervention in varying degrees for all three participants, with important implications for future breast cancer care.

Finally, Teresa Clifford's research challenges strength-based coaching by looking at the experience of coachees during this coaching process. Again, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, data from semi-structured interviews and coaching sessions with six female participants was analysed. The findings suggest that strengths-based coaching could be improved by taking account of several key factors that appeared to influence how participants responded to exploring their strengths. Furthermore, the study considers the implications for various elements in the coaching process such as the coaching relationship, the structuring of coaching interventions, the skills and role of the coach and the issues for which strengths-based coaching may be appropriate.

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