



*Reflecting pathways to
learning and change*



F. Campone, Inc. Newsletter

Currents in Coaching Research: Past, Present and Future

Writing about coaching research is a little like writing about the color blue; everyone agrees it exists but each person experiences it somewhat differently. Nonetheless, without it, our shared experience of the world would be significantly impoverished. Without the color blue, the sky, the sea, cornflowers and blueberries would be mere ghostly images. So, too, without a solid body of research, the professional practice of coaching lacks substance and definition. This month's column offers a summary of a paper I am preparing for publication on coaching research past, present and future. I hope it encourages readers to explore some of the recent developments in coaching research and use the materials to strengthen and deepen their own coaching practices.

For a solid overview of coaching research past (1955-2002), readers are referred to two excellent sources: Kampa-Kokesh and Anderson's comprehensive review of the literature and Dr. Anthony Grant's annotated bibliography. Grant's bibliography edges into the period I arbitrarily defined as "present" – i.e. beginning in 2003. Of the 417 papers cited in Grant's bibliography, 82% were published after 1996. Seventy-four percent of the empirical studies were published in or after 2001. A pre-2001 and post-2001 comparison of research topics reveals some slight trends. Articles linking athletics and business coaching disappear after 2001, as do those presenting coaching as a training strategy. Articles on coaching for remedial performance improvement decline slightly and those on coaching as a leadership strategy increase slightly.

The year 2003 brought a new venue for coaching research into the field with the first ICF Coaching Research Symposium. The published Proceedings offered the first cross-disciplinary literature on the theory and practice of coaching. The presentations at that and subsequent ICF Research Symposia and the papers published in the respective Proceedings are indicative of the growing diversity within the field of coaching and coaching research. Papers on approaches to coaching examined models from psychology (the use of narrative liminality, behavioral psychology in 2004, adult development in 2003 and 2004, a cognitive approach in 2003) and organizational development (Appreciative Inquiry and adaptive coaching in 2005). Theoretical models are also represented: Evidence-Based Coaching and Relational Flow in 2005; archetypes of the coach role, coaching as dialogue and the use of metaphor in 2003. The growing global dimensions of coaching showed up in studies of coaching in South America and the Phillipines (2004), South Africa (2005) and China (2006) and with Indigenous college students in Canada (2004).

The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations (www.ijco.org) first appeared in 2003, offering a mix of articles and empirical studies in each themed issue. A special issue with a focus on coaching research was published in 2005 (volume 3, #1). That issue offered a review of recent studies with a focus on methodologies; case studies of specific interventions; two articles on coaching specific

populations; two articles on ROI methods. Interest in measures of coaching outcomes and in the application of specific models in coaching is seen in the articles appearing in Consulting Psychology Journal during this period. The Fall 2004 (Issue 56, number 4) edition included studies of several conceptual approaches in executive coaching: cognitive-behavioral, rational-emotive, action frame theory and psychodynamic approaches. Subsequent issues have included one or more articles on coaching-specific research.

The voice of psychology in the field of coaching has taken on new energy in two web-based publications: The International Journal of Evidence-Based Coaching and Mentoring (IJEBCM) and The International Coaching Psychology Review. In August, 2003, the IJEBCM (<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/education/ijebcm/vol1-no1.htm>) published its first issue. The Coaching Psychologist- which became The International Coaching Psychology Review in 2006 (<http://www.bps.org.uk/coachingpsy/publications>) first appeared on-line in July 2005. The material is scholarly and presumes a fairly high level of familiarity with core theories and models in the field of psychology. The International Coaching Psychology Review is published under the joint auspices of the British and Australian Psychological Societies. These organizations and the European Coach Federation have held symposia and forums on coaching research in conjunction with their conferences.

Perhaps the richest source of coaching research in the present is found in doctoral dissertations. A search of Dissertation Abstracts using the keyword “coaching”, excluding “athletics” and “schools”, published in English in the past five years yielded 166 results. Eliminating those which were not coaching specific left 134 approved dissertations. As might be expected, a significant number of these examined some aspect of organizational, leadership or executive coaching. An equal number explored coaching in other sectors: educational settings (schools and universities) and in church leadership development. Six dissertations explored physical or mental health-related coaching. Dissertations on life and personal coaching included examining the construct of happiness, skills and strategies used in coaching for creativity and problem-solving, and coaching for motivation. Special populations studied included men at mid-life, abrasive executives and African-American women. Dissertation studies linked coaching with adult development theory, cognitive development and models of transformational change.

And the future of coaching research? While I don't have a crystal ball, I see at least four possible themes worthy of further exploration: The first is the Internet as a venue for sharing and collaboration in coaching research. This may entail more electronic journals, use of collaboration software for sharing data, and a more global perspective on the field and practice of coaching. The second prediction is that we'll see an increasing focus on empirically documented models and theories, driven in part by the growing number of coaching-related graduate programs and doctoral studies. Third, I'd predict a broadening understanding of outcomes measures, derived in part from the growing presence of researchers from fields such as education, health and psychology. My fourth prediction is the incremental inclusion of research literacy in coach preparation and education programs. Stay tuned- it's exciting to watch this aspect of coaching unfold!
