Research and Practice in Coaching and Supervision: How to Build on an Ambivalent Relationship?

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Overview

I. An ambivalent relationship: mutual reassurance and criticism

II. Taking seriously the inner logic of the two fields: Key differences and contradictions

III. What can social psychology tell us about the relationship between research and practice?
   - Processes and outcomes of intergroup contact
   - Favourable conditions of intergroup contact
**Mutual reassurance of each other’s importance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioners</th>
<th>Researchers</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>importance to scientifically back own practice and to further professionalize coaching/supervision (→ quality assurance)</td>
<td>dialogue with practitioners valuable and indispensable</td>
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</table>

BUT…

Möller, 2009; Möller, Kotte & Oellerich, 2013
Practitioners‘ criticism: Research does not...

... inspire
- often very narrow research questions → practical relevance?

... inform
- research results: often difficult to understand and interpret; presented in extremely condensed academic articles

... instruct
- value of aggregated means for working with individuals?; hardly any „if-then-rules“ or concepts for practical application
- *If they were present, experienced coaches/supervisors would not adopt them: only novices stick to rules.* (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1987)

Padberg, 2012;
Möller, 2009; Möller, Kotte & Oellerich, 2013
Researchers’ criticism: Practitioners…

... defend coaching/supervision approaches with unfounded conviction (Scherf, 2010, p.11)

⇒ ...inspite of lacking theoretical and methodical grounding for much of what is done in coaching/supervision

... lock researchers out

⇒ deny access, hardly any „openings“ of coaching/supervision processes to research, especially beyond post-hoc surveys (audio- and videotapes, process measures)

... want only to legitimize and confirm own practice (Haubl, 2009)

⇒ are not really interested in or willing to learn from research findings (f.ex. Padberg, 2012)

Möller, 2009; Möller, Kotte & Oellerich, 2013
Practice and research - an unbridgeable gap?

Möller, 2009; Möller, Kotte & Oellerich, 2013
Practice and research

„There are two... cultures, the culture of researchers and clinicians [coaching/supervision practitioners] ...”

Hillecke on ResearchGate, 2014

www.researchgate.net/post/How_to_bridge_the_gap_between_research_and_clinical_practice_in_psychotherapy
Practice and research

Difference in primary tasks of the two fields

Practice
enable clients to better understand and deal with their situation

Research
generate and expand empirically based knowledge

→ Conflicting approaches with regards to
(a) dealing with complexity
(b) the intimacy of the coaching/supervision process
(c) creating and using knowledge
## Dealing with complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To foster or maintain clients’ ability to act = to reduce complexity</td>
<td>To further differentiate and question the present state of knowledge = to increase complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➔ absorb uncertainty, refer to rather simple concepts</td>
<td>➔ duty of „organized skepticism“ (Kieser, 2005): maintain status of not-knowing, criticism, doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➔ limits to complexity: perception and processing capacities of organisational members and the coach/supervisor</td>
<td>➔ continuously raise further questions, further differentiate existing concepts</td>
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**Paid for** offering new „models“ of sensemaking, enable clients to make informed choices and act on them „Advisors have to voice their advice with conviction.“ (Kieser, 2005, p.12)

**Research funds** and scientific reputation **through** increasing complexity and differentiation (further refinement of research gap)

Baecker, 1998; Kieser, 2005; Möller, 2009; Möller, Kotte & Oellerich, 2013
Dealing with the intimacy of the coaching/supervision process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Research</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaching/supervision as „closed shop“:</td>
<td>Without audio- or videotapes: only self-report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trust and solid working alliance =</td>
<td>measures of coaches and coachees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical for success; high value of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ research disturbs!</td>
<td>→ highly subject to (positive) bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>→ ability to express what is crucial?</td>
</tr>
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Haubl, 2009; Kotte & Möller, 2013; Möller, 2009
## Creating and using knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expert practitioner knowledge</th>
<th>Scientific knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generated from the reality of coaching practice and training institutions</td>
<td>Generated from the academic research operations of universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit, subjective</td>
<td>Explicit, objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case-specific (single case)</td>
<td>Generalizable (group means)</td>
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„Experts know and coaches coach because of their capability of a highly selective way of dealing with scientific knowledge.“ (Baecker, 1998, S.17)

Baecker, 1998; Haubl, 2009; Möller, 2009; Möller, Kotte & Oellerich, 2013
Generating knowledge within the „scientific community“

- Knowledge = scientific
  if „it consists of claims that have been subjected to methodical doubt and have withstood it so far.“

- 4 Steps of knowledge generation
  1. Research activities of individual coaching/supervision researchers or research groups
  2. Collegial criticism by other researchers (conferences, peer-reviewed journals)
  3. Integration to a 'stock of knowledge' (reviews, meta-analyses)
  4. Controversies at the level of philosophy of science

Haubl, 2009
Generating knowledge within the „scientific community“

„Dwarfs on the shoulders of giants“
Bernhard of Chartres, 1120

A research frontier: a place where innovative research pushes the boundaries of science or knowledge. It may also be an outpost, a remote or isolated place.

http://researchfrontier.wordpress.com
Frontier of research in coaching/supervision: the future?

A research frontier: a place where innovative research pushes the boundaries of science or knowledge. It may also be an outpost, a remote or isolated place.

http://researchfrontier.wordpress.com
Generating knowledge within the „community of practice“

- **Players**
  professional associations and training institutes implementing their standards

- **4 Steps of generating knowledge**
  1. Personal experience as supervisee
  2. First own supervision practice under supervision
  3. Own supervision practice (reflection during, in retrospect) accompanied by control supervision, intervision, Balint groups…
  4. Theoretical and case-focused seminars (documenting results, arguing) (Jüttemann, 1990)

→ „community of practice“ as matrix of master-apprentice relationships

Haubl, 2009
Practice and research

“There are two… cultures, the culture of researchers and clinicians [or coaching/supervision practitioners] … and they congregate with[in] their own tribe.”

Hillecke on ResearchGate, 2014
What can we learn from social psychology regarding intergroup relations?

Differentiation into ingroup („us“) and outgroup („them“) automatically leads to…

→ Ingroup favoritism (positive distinctiveness of ingroup)

→ Possible outgroup devaluation (stereotypes, prejudice) / discrimination

→ Perception of outgroup homogeneity while maintaining ingroup heterogeneity

Kessler & Mummendey, 2007; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1986
There are two… cultures, the culture of researchers and clinicians [or coaching/supervision practitioners] and they congregate with[in] their own tribe. Therefore to bridge the gap would mean to increase interaction.”
What can we learn from intergroup contact theory?

Intergroup contact generally tends to produce positive effects for intergroup relations

- reduction of stereotyping and prejudice (f.ex. outgroup heterogeneity…)
- generating affective ties (increased liking, decreased mistrust, increased willingness to cooperate…)
- ingroup reappraisal (more critical self-evaluation)

BUT: not under all conditions …

Think about negative experiences with „the other side“ you may have had

Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011; Pettigrew et al., 2011
What can we learn from intergroup contact theory?

Allport’s (1954) favourable situational conditions for positive effects of intergroup contact

1. Common goal
2. Mutual interdependence (instead of competition)
3. Equal status in the intergroup contact situation
4. Support from norms, authorities and institutions
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Role of professional associations

- Research sections, conferences, funding of research projects...
- Umbrella function? f.ex. current controversial debate between researchers and practitioners triggered by a study on negative effects of coaching, two of the key players being members of the DBVC
1. + 2. Mutual interdependence and common goal

Mutual interdependence

- Researchers: need sufficiently large samples of coaches/supervisors to do their research on
- Practitioners: required to demonstrate evidence and engage in quality assurance (from clients and professional associations)

Common goal

- Relevant research questions?
3. Equal status

Accept positive mutual distinctiveness regarding competence

- Practitioners' wealth of experience
- Researchers' methodological expertise (research designs, methods of data collection, standards for case study descriptions etc.)

Invest effort into the practitioner-researcher-relationship

- Eye-level: neither only Bachelor/Master students nor pretension of professorship
- Mutual service provision (collect data, provide evaluation tools, feed results back)
Summary

I. An ambivalent relationship: mutual reassurance and criticism

II. Taking seriously the inner logic of the two fields:
   Key differences and contradictions

III. Suggestions from intergroup contact theory
   - Support from norms and authorities
   - Mutual interdependence and common goals
   - Equal status
References


References


