

Parallels of Doctoral Supervision and Long-Term Coaching Journeys

PAULINE ARMSBY *

And

PHYLLIS CAMPAGNA*

Middlesex University, London, UK

This short paper builds on previous work in the area of supervision of professional doctorates, supervision and coaching, and explores the relationship between Long Term (LT) Coaching and doctoral supervision in a transdisciplinary professional doctorate. We begin by summarizing the experience of one doctoral supervisee (Phyllis) whose research focused on LT Coaching in business and her university supervisor (Pauline). Second, we look at how various parts of the supervision role can parallel those of LT Coaching. Finally, we include some thoughts from those that have undertaken a professional doctorate and make some tentative recommendations for supervisors, coaches and doctoral candidates.

Key words: coaching, doctoral supervision, transdisciplinary, long term coaching, professional doctorates

Introduction

There are several useful guides for doctoral supervisors (Lee, 2012; Wisker, 2012) and to support coaching and mentoring (Parsloe & Wray, 2000). This short paper builds on previous work in the area of supervision of professional doctorates (Boud & Costley, 2007) and supervision and coaching (Armsby and Fillery-Travis, 2009) and explores the relationship between Long Term (LT) Coaching and doctoral supervision in a transdisciplinary professional doctorate.

* Corresponding author P.Armsby@mdx.ac.uk

* Corresponding author Phyllis@exelsis-ps.com

This kind of doctorate recognises the existing expertise of the candidate, their deep understanding of their workplace context, and the complex interplay of different knowledges (subjects/disciplines/professionals) (Costley & Pizzolato, 2018) that can occur within the dyad which contribute to undertaking a work-based research project.

Supervisory style varies across individuals (Lee, 2012), types of programme and in the approaches suggested in training (Lee, 2018), so clearly any parallels drawn with coaching will depend on a range of factors. That said, we consider that doctorates which focus on developing the individual as well as the research knowledge, are more likely to use coaching approaches. These include professional doctorates like the one highlighted in the three case studies on doctoral research in coaching which are published in this edition of the *work based learning ejournal*. More of these case studies from a range of programmes, covering different areas of study can be found on the UK Council for Graduate Education's website (UKCGE, 2021)

We begin the paper by summarizing the experience of one doctoral supervisee (Phyllis) whose research focused on LT Coaching in business and her university supervisor (Pauline). This research is further outlined in one of the published case studies. Second, we look at how various parts of the supervision role can parallel those of LT Coaching. Finally, we include some thoughts from those that have undertaken a professional doctorate and make some tentative recommendations for supervisors, coaches and doctoral candidates.

Phyllis's Experience as a Doctoral Candidate

Having just completed my own doctoral program which researched how long-term coaching engagements affect a coach's process and approach, I have been reflecting on the progression and development of both my dissertation and myself over the past six years.

Each doctoral candidate is assigned a university supervisor whose task it is to guide the candidate through the research project to completion. My experience was a bit different – due to various factors, I consecutively worked with three advisors over the course of my research. The result was both positive and challenging, akin in some ways to a coaching client working with different coaches whilst in the midst of attaining a single goal.

Coaching literature (Bachkirova & Borrington, 2018; Baron & Morin, 2009) and my own collected data reinforce the concept that the relationship is a key element in a successful outcome between coach and coachee. My experience as a candidate leads me to conclude that the relationship between advisor and candidate also plays a critical role in determining the success of the outcome.

Finally, separate from working with my university supervisor, I found the world of academia to be quite different from the world of business, both in practice and culture. I had to learn to both work within, and appreciate, those differences to be able to successfully navigate the requirements of my DProf project. My supervisors understood those differences and, especially

in the beginning, guided me until I learned to self-navigate the many facets of the university, particularly as a distance learner.

Pauline's Experience Supervising a Doctoral Candidate

With every candidate, when I set out on the doctoral supervision process, I know I am entering a long-term relationship, possibly several years, with a very specific goal for the candidate to gain a doctorate. With an 'orphan' candidate (Wisker & Robinson, 2013), who has previously experienced what could be a very different style of supervision, the timing will be shorter, and the need to develop that all-important relationship which will help enable the candidate to achieve their doctorate can take some time which can create a different kind of pressure for both parties. As a coach herself, Phyllis had some understanding of the dynamics at play so enabling time at the beginning to talk through and straighten out queries worked well. Like a good stepmother, it is important to put the needs of your charge first. I have found that it is important to use negotiation, persuasion, and argument alongside an appropriate level of emotional support to help candidates develop to doctoral level. This latter ingredient is perhaps the hardest to gauge. Emotional issues can emerge for either of you at any time. Focusing on the candidate's needs combined with the passage of time and development of the relationship can provide for this.

Keeping focus in the doctoral research is hard as so many interesting avenues seem to emerge. There is some scope to diverge, but usually at some cost, and this is less likely after data collection. The level of focus outlined in aims, objectives, research questions or hypotheses, and distilled in the data means that there are boundaries to the scope of working together. I try to use these boundaries to expedite the process. While I might like to discuss tangential issues, that might well interest the candidate, time usually prohibits doing this. The doctoral research is the focus of activity and discussion, but the focus of supervision is on helping the candidate develop doctoral level abilities that will enable them to succeed in the activity. This focus parallels coaching where the coachee may be developing understanding to help them achieve a goal.

The candidate is on their journey (in work) and I occasionally 'drop in' to their experience to help them draw out relevant themes- like a qualitative researcher. But also, to attain the knowledge and practice benchmarks of doctoral quality: literature review of knowledge and information, argument, critique; methodology, tools of data collection and analysis, research ethics; drawing conclusions, and making recommendations and impact; academic and research writing.

Relationship Parallels and Differences Between Supervising and LT Coaching

In the doctorate discussed here, the handbook for candidates notes that 'Your DoS (primary supervisor) who continues to give guidance on procedural and regulatory aspects of Part 2 (project), including the format of your final submission of work [.....] supports you in meeting Level 8 assessment criteria; checks on your final write up and advises on your viva presentation.

Your supervisor is also the person who confirms or otherwise your readiness to submit your project for assessment'. These regulatory, administrative and assessment elements of the role suggest a 'manager as coach' (Campagna, 2020) approach, and a 'service model', similar to that in coaching where the supervisor, like the coach, provides a service rather than focusing on a collegial relationship. Keeping these services in mind, what follows is our perspective on how these activities compare and how each can, and perhaps should, borrow from the activities and mindset of the other.

Some of the similarities include:

Both coach and advisor must get to know the person they are working with – not just their subject matter, but what informs their thinking and work, to understand their 'filters' on life. This is necessary to be able to surface and address both blind spots and areas of knowledge. In both activities, it is especially important to meet the person 'where they are' and not to impose the coach's or supervisor's culture on the client. If there is not synergy between the two, the likelihood of success is greatly diminished in both situations.

Supervisors recognise their candidates' expertise and that what is usually a new experience of doctoral study can be daunting. Supervisors listen for explicit or sometimes implied apprehensions in order to help the candidate alleviate them. It is the responsibility of the coach to be open and candid about what they see for the client. Thus, in coaching and supervision it is best that the 'client' brings their needs and anxieties for discussion.

Both coach and supervisor control most of the meeting agenda in the beginning, often setting and suggesting specific goals and targets to achieve between meetings. As the work and relationship progresses, both the coachee and candidate tend to take more control of those objectives.

Though the work is strictly the aspirant's domain, both coach and supervisor are committed to the person's success whilst at the same time, ensuring that all decisions are the result of the person doing the work and not that of the person guiding the process.

Supervisors are encouraged to review progression toward the end of each academic year to flag any issues in the overall sequence of events leading to completion of the doctorate. Coaches are advised and expected to review goals and expectations with the coachee at least annually. This step is always important, but especially relevant in LT coaching to ensure that coaching is the activity taking place and that the relationship is not devolving into chitchat and habit.

Conversely, some of the disparities noted between the two activities include:

A doctoral supervisor, by definition, is likely to be directive at times, for example, by pointing out that ethical procedures need to be tightened, whilst coaching in its pure form is generally considered to be non-directive. Interestingly, many coaches believe it is nearly inevitable that they offer direction and advise over time whilst supervisors seem to become less directive as the research progresses and the candidate becomes more research-minded.

Supervisors have knowledge in research and of the doctoral level criteria which they will convey as required to their supervisee. While coaches may have similar knowledges, for example, in leadership capabilities or intercultural communication, their role is less likely to involve schooling and confirmation of level of accomplishment. Supervisors aim to support their candidate meet a threshold standard.

Supervisor and candidate can often become like colleagues, even before a doctorate is complete. This collegial relationship could include co-authoring and co-presenting of material. A coach generally remains 'hands-off,' holding an adherence to the defined roles during the coaching engagement. By the end of the journey, like coach and LT coachee, the supervisor and candidate may not retain their relationship as both type of interaction are led by needs that will hopefully have been met. But in both cases, the relationship is more than transactional because of the range and depth of experiences shared.

Professional Doctorate Candidate Voices

The following provides four further perspectives on the theme of parallels in supervision and coaching from coaches that have experienced doctoral supervision.

The article resonates with my own experience of being supervised on my doctorate and in my coaching practice. Coaches and the lead doctoral supervisor both support an individual on a significant journey in which they are finding themselves. Not only is an individual learning, or advancing a specific subject, they are learning about themselves. To be effective, both coach and lead doctoral supervisor must create an environment in which the individual can thrive. This means creating the space and prompts for the individual to learn about themselves, to offer constructive challenge, to avoid a directive approach as reflected in this work from Armsby and Campagna. The value of multiple doctorate supervisors also reflects my experience however one lead supervisor 'holding' the learning journey for the learner is powerful in my experience and akin to coaching. DProf alumni, Dr Caroline Horner, i-coach academy

This article resonates with my experience as a doctoral candidate. Each of my 3 supervisors has fulfilled a coaching role, supporting and guiding me on the roller-coaster ride that is Doctoral study. Inevitably life impacts progress and my supervisors have taken me by the hand and led me firmly but kindly through. The only thing that occurs to me as a difference is that as coaches, long-term or otherwise, there is far more to navigate in terms of a doctorate given the interaction of the various university teams such as admin, library etc than as coaches we would expect to deal with. I find the comparison between doctoral supervision and coaching really useful, especially as a coach. I wish I had made the connection in the early days, it would have helped me to "use" my supervisor appropriately. DProf alumni, Jane Freeman-Hunt.

I think the article provokes some good thoughts about the role of the supervisor and the relationship with the student. Of course, no two relationships are the same so this article will speak more to some than others. In my experience as a doctoral student, a Doctorate Supervisor may deploy a coaching style or coaching approach – similar to the comparison made in the Harvard Business Review article about manager as coach. A coaching supervisor can also have similar responsibilities to a Doctorate Supervisor which means they too may have a level of authority over their supervision client, e.g. if I believe my supervision client is behaving unethically, I have a responsibility to report this appropriately. DProf Candidate, Sam Humphrey.

Although my experience was quite similar to that of Phyllis', my timeline was much shorter with only a little more than a year. The guidance and support of my supervisor was instrumental, helping me set the overall goal of completion and intermittent goals for each chapter so I was able to submit my final draft in time. My supervisor also drew on the meaning of the project – a gift for my mother - to reinforce my self-motivation. This is akin to contracting in coaching.

My supervisor was tough when I fell behind and when she gave me constructive feedbacks. Knowing that I am someone who is very achievement-oriented and do not like to let people down, her initial feedback really motivated and inspired me to work at more than my best to produce the required quality. She was also caring and understanding when needed, especially during periods when I was really under extreme pressure from my business which suffered from the impact of COVID. I felt safe and supported, like on a lifeboat. This is like a coach maintaining a trusting and safe space for the coaching relationship to develop, and holding the coachees accountable for their commitments and actions.

Overall, I felt the supervision relationship was one of partnership, in which I was guided, supported, accompanied, and empowered. DProf Alumni, Catherine Ng, Enrichment.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

This review of the experience of supervision and its relationship to long term coaching has outlined a number of similarities between the roles, especially in terms of the nature of the supportive relationship. In general, the main difference between the two roles follows from the nature of the outcomes expected from each. Supervisors support their candidates towards a more defined doctoral standards benchmark than is usual for coaching, so there is less

latitude to follow the candidate or other outside body's objectives. That said, coachees goals can often be guided by an externally created agent's picture of success. There will always be external realities to be considered; the coach and the supervisor support their charges through managing these. But importantly, both do this by recognizing and developing their charge's unique abilities and goals.

Based on this short paper, some suggestion for developing practices going forward are as follows.

- Clarity around the nature of the supervisory relationship, especially in terms of its parallel with coaching, including for example, feeling safe could help candidates make the most of their supervisor.
- Doctoral supervisors should consider how they can balance supporting, encouraging and empowering the candidate's development alongside helping them meet set levels of performance.
- As in coaching, helping candidates understand what motivates them can help support progress.
- Keeping focus on the goals and any barriers to the coachee/supervisee achieving them is important, as is monitoring success in doing this in the time available.
- It is worth reviewing how and when communications become more directive, and being clear about the reasons behind this.
- Supervisees might benefit from sharing their experiences of developing their learning. Similarly, coachees might also benefit from doing this.
- Supervisors, candidates and coaches need to recognise the importance and influence of other stakeholders in the learning processes taking place.

Notes on contributors

Dr Pauline Armsby, C.Psychol AFBPsS

Pauline has been a Doctoral Supervisor for more than 20 years and specialises in assisting individuals in defining and implementing their research, professional and personal objectives. She lives near London and works with supervisees both nationally and internationally. The heart of her work is to support candidates' learning through an effective, work based research process. When not supervising, teaching or researching, she enjoys traveling, walking, and genealogy.

Dr Phyllis Campagna, ChBC™

Phyllis has been a Business Coach for 31 years and specializes in assisting individuals in defining and implementing their professional and personal objectives. She lives in the Chicago metro area and works with clients both nationally and internationally. The heart of her work is to meld clients' goals and talents into an effective and integral plan of action. When not coaching, she enjoys traveling, collecting holiday movies, and genealogy.

References

- Armsby, P. and A. Fillery-Travis. (2009, July). Developing the Coach: Using Work Based Learning Masters and Doctorate Programmes to Facilitate Coaches Learning. Paper presented at the UALL Work Based Learning Network Annual Conference: The Impact of Work Based Learning for the Learner, University of the West of England.
- Bachkirova, T. & Borrington, S. (2018). Old wine in new bottles: Exploring pragmatism as a philosophical framework for the discipline of coaching. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, Vol 18 (3): 337 – 360.*
- Baron, L.& Morin, L. (2009). The coach-coachee relationship in executive coaching: A field study. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 20(1): 85-106.*
- Boud, D., and C. Costley. (2007). From project supervision to advising: new conceptions of the practice. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 44(2): 119-130.*
- Campagna, P. (2020). *What is the Effect of Long-Term Coaching Engagement on the Business Coach's Process and Approach?* (Doctoral Dissertation). Middlesex University, London.
- Costley, C., and N. Pixxolato. (2018). Transdisciplinary qualities in practice doctorates. *Studies in Continuing Education, 40(1): 30-45.*
- Lee, A. (2012). *Successful Research Supervision: Advising Students Doing Research.* Oxford: Routledge.
- Lee, A. (2018). How can we develop supervisors for the modern doctorate? *Studies in Higher Education, 43(5): 878-890.*
- Parsloe, E. & M. Wray. (2000) *Coaching and Mentoring.* London: Kogan Page.
- UKCGE (2021) ICPPD Impact Case Study Collection. Retrieved from [ICPPD www.ukcge.ac.uk/events/documents/icppd-impact-case-studies-92.aspx](http://www.ukcge.ac.uk/events/documents/icppd-impact-case-studies-92.aspx) Accessed 26 April 2021.
- Wisker, G. & G. Robinson. (2013). Doctoral 'orphans': nurturing and supporting the success of postgraduates who have lost their supervisors. *HE Research and Development, 32 (2): 300-313.*
- Wisker, G. (2012). *The Good Supervisor.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.