

Engagement in Research in Coaching, Mentoring and Supervision

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Abstract

This research, initiated by the EMCC Global Research Centre for Excellence (CFE), aimed to clarify perceptions and usage of research within the coaching, mentoring, and supervision community. A quantitative online survey, which included qualitative open-ended questions, was conducted and gathered responses from 196 participants, primarily EMCC members, from 44 countries. The survey explored themes related to the role of research in coaching, mentoring, and supervision, covering areas such as the perception and usage of research, understanding research, areas of interest, and desired support in the research area.

The findings of this study indicate that professionals see research as an important part of their continuous professional development (CPD), with a significant proportion of respondents expressing a desire to improve their practice through research-based evidence (91%) and an interest in enhancing their ability to interpret research (53%). The survey also revealed a diverse range of perceptions of research, from robust academic science to practical tools for everyday practices and discussion with colleagues. In terms of preferred areas of research, effectiveness and impact are key, as well as a focus on supervision, including the definition of supervision and support for supervisors. Participants emphasized the need for support, particularly in terms of better access to research articles and publications and support in understanding and conducting research.

This study highlights the diverse perceptions and interests surrounding research in coaching, mentoring, and supervision. It underscores the significance of research in enhancing professional practice and the demand for support and collaboration in this area. The findings provide valuable insights for future research initiatives and resources within the EMCC community and show that research uptake as well as doing research could be usefully supported as CPD.

Originality/value of article

This research represents the initial investigation into the perceptions and utilization of research, as well as the necessity for it, among the community of coaches, mentors, and supervisors. The concept for this study was initiated by the EMCC Global Research Centre for Excellence, who also carried out the research. To the best of our knowledge, no similar study has been conducted within the EMCC. The purpose of this text is to cater to those with an interest in research within the field of coaching, mentoring, and supervision, including those who seek to participate actively in research or integrate research findings into their practice as part of their CPD. The research findings provide valuable insights for the work of the EMCC Global Research Centre for Excellence, as well as our own future research endeavours.

Keywords: research; coaching; mentoring; supervision; continuing professional development.

Introduction

Research in general can be one of the sources of CPD of coaches, mentors as well as supervisors in several areas. Engagement in research is even one of the defined elements of CPD by EMCC Global, as well as working in the project team related to development or the profession or the knowledge in coaching / mentoring / supervision (EMCC Global, 2021).

60% of coaches invest annually more than 40 hours in CPD (Passmore, Brown & Csigás, 2017). The minimal amount for accredited Practitioners is 16 hours, for Senior Practitioners 32 per year (www.emccglobal.org). Key pieces of CPD used are reading coaching books followed by reading research articles and attending research conferences and attending short courses in coaching skills (Passmore, Brown & Csigás, 2017). Most coaches are also convinced that coaching should be better informed by research (Passmore, 2021).

The significance of evidence and its utilization in coaching was highlighted by Grant (2016). Hinn & Kotte (2021) identified four attitude factors influencing willingness to participate in coaching research: benefit and damage of coaching research, fear of exposure of coaching inefficacy and effort related to participation in coaching research. These factors, along with previous research participation, significantly predicted the willingness to participate in coaching research. Although there is evidence on how coaches incorporate research in the sporting domain (e.g., Greenwood et al., 2012; Pope et al., 2015), there is a lack of information regarding the EMCC Global community in general.

The purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and usage of the term "research" within the context of coaching, mentoring, and supervision. The research was initiated by the EMCC Global Centre for Excellence (CfE) in Research. The study aimed to investigate the sources used by individuals in the community to understand and utilize research in their coaching, mentoring, and supervision practices, as well as to identify topics of interest. The results of the survey informed the development of specific projects within EMCC Global CfE for Research.

Research method and sample

The research was prepared and conducted by members of the CfE in the spring of 2022. This was a mapping and descriptive study. It comprised a quantitative online survey, which included several qualitative, open-ended questions. The survey was distributed to EMCC Global news subscribers via email, and data was collected from June to August 2022.

In total, 196 participants completed the survey, 89% of them are EMCC Global members. Participants were from 44 countries, with global spread, representing all EMCC Global regions – i.e., Europe and UK, Asia Pacific, US and Canada, Middle East, Africa. More than half of participant self-identified as coach (104 participants), mentor (7) or supervisor (3). Others defined their roles to be combined: coaches and mentors (38), coaches, mentors and supervisors (27), coach and supervisor (16).

The data were analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics methods. Open-ended questions were thoroughly examined, individual responses were classified and then aggregated.

Results

Based on the expert dialogues in the group, several research themes have been identified:

1. The utilization of research by coaches, mentors, and supervisors and the resources they employ.
2. The perception of research by coaches, mentors, and supervisors, including their understanding of research.
3. The research topics interesting for professionals within the fields of coaching, mentoring, and supervision.
4. The support required by professionals in the field of research.

Theme 1: Utilization of the Research

A majority of participants in the study (91%) expressed an interest in **improving their practice** through the use of research-based evidence. Additionally, more than half of the participants (53%) aimed to **improve their knowledge and ability to understand and interpret research**. A significant proportion of participants (57%) viewed research as an **important aspect of CPD**, with 29% acknowledging its importance. However, only **42% felt confident in distinguishing between quality research and the latest fads**, with 31% feeling strongly confident and 11% feeling fully confident.

A considerable proportion of participants (38%) expressed an **interest in conducting their own research**, with the majority (56%) expecting to spend less than 10 hours per month on this activity. A smaller percentage (16%) anticipated spending between 10-15 hours per month, while 14.5% anticipated spending more than 30 hours.

The most frequently utilized sources of information were conferences and workshops, followed by web pages and online research resources. Participants also utilized academic sources, periodicals, and books, with regular reading of books being less common compared to other sources. Table 1 provides a summary.

Table 1: Research sources (*% of participants providing this answer*)

Q: What research sources do you normally use? Please tick each of the categories where you gather research information for coaching, mentoring and/or supervision (N=196)

Conferences and workshops	80 %
Organization & associations websites	70 %
Online research resources (e.g., Google Scholar, Research Gate, publisher resources)	69 %
Professional social network e. g. LinkedIn	64 %
University online libraries & academic journals	62 %
Periodicals (e.g., HBR, CIPD)	56 %
Social network e .g. sites/blogs/articles;	49 %
Word of Mouth	27 %
Formal programme of study (e.g., Masters, PhD)	39 %
Books	3 %

Theme 2: Perception and Understanding of the Research

It is apparent that there exists a disparate understanding of what research entails, **ranging from a perceived notion of a rigorous academic discipline and scientific rigor to a simpler approach of seeking news** and advice from experienced colleagues. The perception of research varies among professionals, with some viewing it as an essential component of their coaching, mentoring, and supervision practice, while others see it as a means of comprehending human behavior.

Research is often viewed as **an important tool, bringing evidence** to support the aforementioned practices, and this is reflected in the responses to other questions posed.

However, research is also associated with **negative connotations**, including concerns about the quantity, quality, and developmental stage of research. Nonetheless, some participants view research as an expanding field. Table 2 groups the responses, including individual samples.

Theme 3: Areas of Interest

The majority of participants (96%) is interested in further research in coaching, 58% of participants are interested in research in mentoring and 59% are interested in research in supervision.

Research interests in Coaching

This data highlights the diverse range of research interests within the field of coaching. The majority of respondents identified impact and effectiveness as key research topics (36%), followed by the coaching process (25%) and the application of neuroscience in coaching (10%). Additionally, leadership and coaching in organizations were deemed relevant, and mental health topics are gaining traction. A number of participants expressed specific research interests, such as the comparison of coaching and counselling or the boundaries of coaching. Table 3 provides an overview of responses.

Research in Mentoring

Research data indicates that mentoring is a topic of significant interest, with a focus on both its practical application and efficiency, as well as its comparison with coaching (see Table 4). The utilization of mentoring in organizations, particularly for leadership development, is also of importance. Reverse (or reciprocal) mentoring, in which more experienced individuals receive guidance from less experienced individuals, is also a topic of interest.

Research in Supervision

47 individuals identified themselves as Supervisors, with the majority expressing interest in research. However, research on supervision is not limited to just supervisors, as a total of 115 participants demonstrated an interest in this field, including coaches and mentors. Compared to Coaching and Mentoring, Supervision is still in the process of defining its role and establishing clear guidelines. Participants called for the evaluation of the impact of supervision on coaches, clients, and the overall outcome of supervision. There is also a higher level of interest in researching the competencies, skills, personality, and mindset of supervisors, as well as exploring the definition of supervision, supervision of team coaching, and group supervision (see Table 5).

Table 2: Description of research (*% of participants providing this type of answer, examples provided*) Q: How would you describe research into coaching, mentoring and/or supervision? N=196

<i>% of participants</i>	Examples of responses
24%	<p>Provided some definition of research – what does it mean, how they understood research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The art and science of understanding what is done, it's impact and its source using multiple views originated from different approaches (psychology, business, neuroscience, theology, sociology, anthropology...)</i> • <i>Developing and expanding the knowledge and practice of coaching. Working alongside academics, thought leaders and class leading practitioners to greater understanding of individual and team flourishing. Awareness of the wider ecosystem in which coaching is set - socially, culturally (and cross-culturally), environmentally, economically.</i> • <i>The application of psychology and behavioural science to meet the needs of the wider population.</i> • <i>Bringing scientific rigour to understanding the nature and impact of coaching/mentoring/supervision approaches and sharing that research in a way that encourages its application to practice.</i> • <i>Like in any other field: systematic investigation / study of materials to establish facts and reach conclusions.</i> • <i>Asking key question to collect and gather data on relevant present and future trends.</i> • <i>Developing and expanding the knowledge and practice of coaching. Working alongside academics, thought leaders and class leading practitioners to greater understanding of individual and team flourishing. Awareness of the wider ecosystem in which coaching is set - socially, culturally (and cross-culturally), environmentally, economically.</i> • <i>Consultation with existing Coaches, Mentors, Supervisors, Clients and orgs to identify current issues and trends and their impact on coaching/supervision practice.</i> • <i>Understanding the way human are working, functioning in order to adjust our processes. That includes subtle approaches such as constellations, meditation or very scientific approaches such as neurosciences.</i>
18%	<p>Connected research with showing impact or evidence for coaching / mentoring / supervision practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Establishing evidence - based practice for general and/or specific inclusion in coaching together with the testing of conceptual frameworks which have the objective of pushing the boundaries of coaching knowledge.</i> • <i>Necessary, but a very new field. It's the empirical evidence of showing the impact of coaching, mentoring and or supervision. As the effect often is mid - or long-term visible, it's difficult to gain data.</i> • <i>For me it's a necessity in order show the benefits coaching can bring especially if used in an organisation as internal coaching.</i> • <i>Research brings the evidence of the effectiveness of Coaching and enriches the practice with new learnings and insights.</i> • <i>Helpful allowing me to have confidence in the conversations with clients.</i> • <i>Valuable input on where the practice is going, on how the client's needs evolve but mostly, what is expected from us coaches, mentors and supervisors.</i> • <i>An indispensable tool to understand better specific aspects of mentoring/coaching/supervision from different perspectives in a range of contexts to inform mentors/coaches/supervisors with the aim of improving their practice.</i>
18%	<p>Mentions that research is important, needed in general.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Essential to informed practice</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Important and useful</i> • <i>Necessary so that we stay on top of all up to date changes or modifications in how we practice.</i> • <i>Very important and it helps to inform my practice. I like to keep up to date with what new is being thought about /researched into, in the wider coaching world.</i> • <i>Really essential for the development and credibility of the profession</i>
15%	<p>Negative associations connected to current state of research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Vital but limited</i> • <i>Very narrow from a practitioner perspective</i> • <i>Limited because of the lack of consensual agreement of the definition of coaching</i> • <i>Currently, somewhat uneven and Western-centric</i> • <i>Distant and not accessible</i> • <i>Almost inexistent</i>
8%	<p>Research is growing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Becoming stronger</i> • <i>Growing but still under communicated to the wider coaching community</i> • <i>Coaching research is emerging and needs further testing, examination, analysis oversight.</i> • <i>Emerging. Greater body of work would be appreciated, more technical/scientific/academic, peer-reviewed etc</i>
18%	<p>Other answers, not fitting exactly to previous categories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not sure but I think there needs to be more consensus on terms and definitions and more practitioner research.</i> • <i>Continuous improvement.</i> • <i>Unknown to me. Don't really track it or aware of it.</i> • <i>I am aware of some happening through David Clutterbuck and Peter Hawkins.</i> • <i>Traditional and mainly Eurocentric.</i>
3%	<p>Comments to question: <i>Unclear, too broad...</i></p>

Table 3: Topics for further research in coaching (*% of participants, examples provided*) Q:

Please provide suggested specific topics of research for Coaching. N=186

%	Topic	Examples of answers
36 %	Effectiveness and impact of coaching	<i>Long term benefits of working with a coach; Evidence of results; Value on investment vs ROI</i>
25 %	Coaching process (tools, techniques...)	<i>Coaching presence; multi-layered meanings in "normal" coaching conversations; Interested in the general areas of goal setting, motivation, and commitment to action</i>
10 %	Neuroscience in coaching	<i>Neuroscience and how the brain is working; Neuroplasticity / neuroscience in coaching; Transfer mechanism; neurones mirror</i>
9 %	Leadership and coaching	<i>executive and leadership development through one-on-one and team coaching; leadership and executive coaching</i>
8 %	Coaching in organizations	<i>typology of companies according to their use of coaching: coaching strategy, related organisation, processes, tools, measurements etc. When/where/how accessed - internal/ external to organisations</i>
5 %	Coach (competencies, CPD...)	<i>Experience of coaches/credentials vs assignments/coaching hours undertaken; Emotions of the Coach; CPD; coaching competencies</i>
5 %	Mental health topics (resilience, work-life balance, trauma, ADHD...)	<i>Understanding how to coach a neurodiverse client; Resilience; Health and wellbeing</i>
5 %	Team Coaching	<i>Team Coaching impact on individual and organization; evidence for effectiveness of team coaching</i>

Table 4: Topics for further research in mentoring (% of participants, examples) Q:

Please provide suggested specific topics of research for Mentoring. N=113

%	Topic	Examples of answers
21%	Mentoring process (techniques, approaches)	Huge gap currently in understanding frequency, practicalities of formal mentoring programmes; Moving from rules-based approaches to knowledge based approaches in providing a learning environment
20%	Mentoring effectiveness (ROI, effect, impact)	Business benefits of mentoring, gender & diversity mentoring impact; Long term impact of Mentoring; How to measure effectiveness; Mentoring ROI; Impacts with different types of client
14%	Mentoring vs. Coaching (combining, definitions...)	differences to coaching, How mentoring helps in coaching to continue successfully as a coach; using Mentoring as an as-required component within coaching sessions; Boundaries between coaching and mentoring
10%	Mentoring in organizations	The value of mentors with an organization, inhouse mentors; % of companies who have a formal mentoring program? The key elements of setting up a high performing in-house and cross-organizational mentoring program.
10%	Mentoring and leadership	Mentoring as a manager; leadership mentoring executive mentoring; leaders who study mentoring; mentoring for senior executives
9%	Mentor (competencies, development...)	The ego-deconstruction around learning new skills for mentors etc.; background of mentors; Special abilities to be a Mentor
4%	Reverse mentoring	Reverse mentoring
13%	Specific areas or target groups of mentoring (each of them less than 2%)	Cross culture; Diversity; Peer to peer; Team, Group; Socially underprivileged; ESG, Circular economies; Young people; Women

Table 5: Topics for further research in supervision (% of participants, examples)

Q. Please provide suggested specific topics of research for Supervision / N=115

%	Topic	Examples of answers
41 %	<i>Impact</i> (on coaches, on clients, on results)	<i>Research around the efficacy of supervision; Impact on coach growth; How supervision creates a space for better coaching sessions; Why go to a supervisor - benefits, reasons why not</i>
26 %	<i>Process and models</i>	<i>Most effective methodologies and most damaging methodologies; How to embed supervision in day-by-day activities to get immediate feedback and resources</i>
13 %	<i>Supervisor</i> (competencies, skills, mindset...)	<i>Qualities and Competencies of a Good Supervisor; How to gain relevant experience in order to become a coach supervisor and best modalities for this purpose; Background of supervisors, years of experience, age;</i>
6 %	<i>Definition</i> (what is supervision)	<i>What supervision is and how it can benefit new coach development; What it is? Demonstrations. Definition of supervision that strongly builds upon the definition of coaching;</i>
6 %	<i>Supervision of team coaching</i>	<i>Supervision of team coaches - difference from other supervision; New team coaching supervision models and practice;</i>
5 %	<i>Group supervision</i>	<i>Is group supervision or peer supervision as effective or more effective than one to one supervision? Potential benefits/drawbacks of group vs individual supervision, impact of composition of group supervision participants on supervision outcomes</i>
32 %	<i>Other</i> (each less than 2%)	<i>How can supervision evolve to become more specific to coaching and mentoring; Is mindfulness practice supportive in getting less caught up in transference? Supervision for ANY professional consultant (not just Mentor /Coach); Perceptions of ethics; when to keep/switch supervisors; how to find one; Why the resistance to it in the US. What role do coaching bodies (ICF vs EMCC) play? challenging the dominant discourse that has been lifted from therapy; The</i>

Theme 4: Required Support

To explore the expected or desired support from EMCC, the following question was asked: *What could EMCC do to support you in using more research in your practice and make you more confident in research?* Participants were provided with some pre-defined answers.

As a key source of support, the better **accessibility of articles, journals, and publications for practitioners** is highly valued, with 78% of participants expressing this demand. Additionally, 65% of participants indicated a desire for increased knowledge about utilizing research in their daily work through **Research Academy Webinars**. Further, 63% of participants called for **translations of research into simple summaries**. Moreover, nearly one third of participants expressed a need for more **training on how to interpret research**.

A call for support from EMCC and other professional organizations was visible also in answers to the final open-ended question about what else is relevant for research. In addition to answers related to impact and quality of research, professionals asked for cooperation and involvement of practitioners to research, for funding and finance for research and for communication support.

Some concrete request for support were mentioned, like EMCC to have a more important role in research (*EMCC should return to a role in research, through contracts with universities and as a meeting point for researchers from around the world*) or to ask members for being up-to date with research (*Requirement to be up to date with key research is embedded in EMCC membership*).

Some professionals also asked for mentoring to conduct research. (*To write a research article is challenging and to have a mentor to guide the process will be great. To formulate an idea into a research question is very challenging and some help with that will be appreciated*).

Table 6: Other relevant areas (% of participants)

Q: What else do you think is relevant to Research in terms of Coaching, Mentoring and Supervision professions? N=103

17 %	Specific topic or method of research (digitalization, virtual coaching, cross-culture)
14 %	Impact on practice
14 %	Quality aspects of research
12 %	Cooperation (come together, professional exchange...)
9 %	Involvement of practitioners
8%	Communication and PR
7 %	Learning from other disciplines, using theories
6 %	Funding, finance
5 %	Specific support (translations, mentoring, consultation...)
20 %	Other answers (less than 2% each)

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size, which comprises nearly 200 professionals. While their insights provide valuable information on key trends, it is not feasible to draw conclusions about specific countries or regions. This is particularly relevant for local initiatives, where data on specific countries would be beneficial.

It is also possible that mainly those who were interested in the topic of research participated in the survey, which may explain the relatively high levels of interest in further research found in this study. Thus, the overall interest in research may be smaller than the study suggests. Additionally, the sources used in the survey may not be representative of the entire population.

This initial survey was conducted with the purpose of gaining a basic understanding about the topic, hence it was formulated in an ad-hoc manner. For further investigation, various streams of research could be established, comprising of more definitive inquiries, aligned with the specific interests of the EMCC Global CfE for Research and derived from relevant literature sources (e.g., Grant, 2016).

Considering the aforementioned points, it is important to note that the survey provided valuable data and insights that can inform and guide future research efforts in the field of EMCC. The information gathered is not limited to the EMCC but can also be utilized to support a broader range of professionals.

Conclusions and Recommendation

Research is clearly seen as an essential part of CPD for coaches, mentors, and supervisors in various respects. There are diverse perspectives on research, ranging from highly theoretical and academic to highly practical. Research is inextricably linked with the measurement of the impact of coaching, mentoring, and supervision. Research is considered to be of utmost importance but is not yet well developed. Key requirements include the enhancement of practice using research-based evidence and the improvement of knowledge and skills to understand and interpret research. It is expected that the EMCC will offer a variety of research support mechanisms.

There is ample scope for further professional development and training in the field of research pertaining to coaching, mentoring, and supervision professionals. Research is considered a critical aspect of enhancing their practice and engaging in CPD. Consequently, several avenues for addressing the diverse requirements of professionals can be proposed based on the research findings:

- Support and promote engagement in research as part of CPD across EMCC Global, show importance and impact and provide guidance to decrease potential barriers.
- Support and cooperation on academic research, connection with academia to organize research projects.
- Support and training of professionals in understanding research data and in conducting their own research projects. Research workshops can be helpful as well as mentoring researchers or creating research groups working together, for example in countries.
- Help professionals from practice to have access to key learnings from research projects. Some people would appreciate just to have key information, not the details. Newsletters, short articles, special webpage or LinkedIn information can be helpful.

Since this research has been conducted, the EMCC Global CfE for Research has acted on several of these recommendations, including research conferences and educational Research Webinars. These events' priorities can also be further refined through specific quantitative research similar to this study.

This research also presents a considerable number of ideas for those who aim to undertake their own research endeavours. Professional researchers may establish research groups and collaborations centred around specific topics of interest.

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