RESEARCH COACHING:
ENHANCING SUPERVISOR'S LEADER ROLE EFFICACY

Paula Pinto*
Instituto Politécnico de Santarém, Portugal
paula.pinto@esa.ipsantarem.pt
*corresponding author

Éamonn McCallion
Karsltad University, Grants and Innovation Office, Sweden,
eamonn.mccallion@kau.se

James Lees
Karsltad University, Grants and Innovation Office, Sweden,
james.lees@kau.se

Lucrezia Gorini
Inland Norway University of Applied Science, Norway
lucrezia.gorini@inn.no

Maria Potes Barbas
Instituto Politécnico de Santarém, Portugal
maria.barbas@ese.ipsantarem.pt

Madalena Martins
Instituto de Tecnologia Química e Biológica, Universidade Nova, Portugal
madalena.martins@itqb.unl.pt

Margarida Trindade
Instituto de Tecnologia Química e Biológica, Universidade Nova, Portugal
margarida.trindade@itqb.unl.pt

Melanie S. Jones
Liverpool John Moores University, Research and Innovation Services, UK,
M.Jones1@ljmu.ac.uk

Stian S. Torjussen
Inland Norway University of Applied Science, Norway
stian.torjussen@inn.no

Victoria Sheppard
Liverpool John Moores University, Research and Innovation Services, UK,
V.M.Sheppard@ljmu.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Supervisors' leader role efficacy is essential to support PhD students in the transference of both research and transferable skills developed during their doctoral programs, into their future jobs. At

the same time, these leader role efficacy competences will be translated into a more motivated and productive research team. Coaching will facilitate the leader role efficacy development of group leaders and supervisors. This paper reviews the concept of coaching and mentoring; highlights the main aims of coaching, and the fundamental coaching skills the supervisor may use in facilitating students and team members evolution. The paper finalizes presenting the aims of Transpeer project, a transnational skills programme to enhance the employability of researchers. Development of coaching skills in researchers, and follow up of their application in research environment, will permit to build more evidence on the benefits of research coaching, and its future application.

Keywords: active listening, coaching, presence, vision, questioning.

1 INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF COACHING IN RESEARCH

To increase employability of PhDs, it is important that during their doctoral education, they have the time to develop skills away from the laboratory bench, desk, or conference. Education at doctoral level should be more than subject knowledge and paper publication (Fahnert, 2015). In this context, supervisor leader role efficacy is essential to support PhD students in the transference of both research and transferable skills developed during their doctoral programs, into their future jobs (Govaerts, Kyndt, Vreye, & Dochy, 2017). At the same time, these leader role efficacy competences will be translated into a more motivated and productive research team.

Ladegard and Gjerde emphasise that organizations should focus more on interior processes and less in exterior competences as primary outcomes of leadership development programs. Enhanced effective leadership will follow from the development of internal core competencies and coaching is a leadership development tool that contributes to this purpose (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014).

Thus, on one hand, coaching will facilitate the leader role efficacy development of group leaders and supervisors, and on the other hand, if these leaders aquire coaching skills and are able to apply them in the academic or research environment, they will be contributing to increase leadership skills in the future academic or business professionals. Of course, the coachee, either the group leader or the student, must actively engage with his/her development during the coaching sessions. Also, the competency framework is progressive, and it is his/her own responsibility to take it further.

Coaching and mentoring are different and complementary skills in doctoral education and career development. The purpose of coaching is to create awareness leading to self-directed action. The coach acts as a facilitator to activate internal resources and capabilities. Mentoring is based on subject knowledge and life-based experience of the mentor, and his/her own capacity to pass it to the student or trainee. Whereas a mentor acts as adviser, counsellor, guide, tutor, or teacher; a coach acts as a facilitator for unleashing the coachee's potential and mobilization of internal resources to engage in intentional change.

2 COACHING SKILLS

Main aims of coaching are to increase self-awareness and personal power, facilitate identity expansion, focus on solution-based positive thinking, goal definition and commitment to action. Finally, we will look at ourselves as creators of our own lives (Abreu, 2014). Commonly agreed fundamental principles that underlie the coaching process are self-responsibility, respect, acceptance, confidentiality, integrity, transparency, flexibility and neutrality (Bresser & Wilson, 2010). The fundamental skills the coach will use in facilitating the clients' evolution, as well as in exercising these principles, are active listening, powerful questioning, and being present in the moment. To be fully capable of applying these skills, a coach must have already developed his/her internal core of values and authenticity, as well as be engaged in continuous life-learning and self-evolution processes. He/she is also absolute confident in the coachee's capacity to activate internal resources for self-regulation and evolution.

Communication is a two-way process where the sender relays the information, feeling, or ideas that they want to communicate to the receiver, and the receiver acknowledges that they heard or saw the information. The way the receiver perceives the message, as positive or negative, can change the outcome the sender wants to get (Tennant & Toney-Butler, 2017). It is thus essential that a coach engages in active listening during a coaching process. The active listening implies making a conscious effort to pay complete attention to the other person, hearing all the words the other person is saying and observing the body language, without any judgement. There is evidence that active listening enhances cortical responses independently of specific features of the sound (Higgins, McLaughlin, Rinne, & Stecker, 2017), making the coach more able to understand the message the coachee wants to send. It is also important that the coach gives feedback to the coachee to inform that the message was totally received. Feedback is a response from the receiver that includes an acknowledgment but also a recap of what they thought they understood from the sender. By recapping the thought, the sender has an opportunity to agree that the message was received correctly or be able to restate their original intentions for clarification (Tennant & Toney-Butler, 2017). This process allows the coach to ask questions so that the coachee may clarify to himself meanings and intentions within a framework of goals, strategies and actions. Finally, silence sends a very strong message that may indicate the coachee is contemplating his thoughts or is having an insight. It is important to allow the person to process the message and to give him enough time to contemplate a response. Dead space does not need to be filled with idle chatter (Tennant & Toney-Butler, 2017).

Questioning is one of the main sources of facilitating the activation of internal responses. Powerful questions include exploratory questions of reality and ideal state, and clarifying questions. These questions increase awareness and induce insights, new ways of looking at things, opening a broad range of possibilities and channelling these possibilities into actions. Questions that leads to clarification of the personal vision (ideal self, core identity, future aspirations) evoke a psychophysiological state characterized by positive emotions, cognitive openness and optimal neurobiological functioning for complex goal pursuit. (Passarelli, 2015). Personal goals set to meet the vision of an organization, without the context of personal vision may drive short-term changes to attain the organization needs. However, goals set embracing the long term personal coachee vision, that resonate with the coachee values, will activate intrinsic motivation and lead to powerful and permanent changes. At the end this will translate into a better performance in the organization.

The third skill refereed in this paper is presence, also called mindfulness by some authors. This is a state in which the coach develops a deep awareness of self and others, engaging complete attention to the cochee's processes occurring at the moment, which in turn allows for the building of powerful questions. Being present also implies the capacity of silencing internal thoughts, that may be drifting over the subject presented by the coachee. When the coach allows his own judgement or opinion to interfere, for instance by giving advice or asking questions out of curiosity, coach and coachee are no longer engaged in a coaching session. The role of the coach is to act as a mirror, reflecting back the coachee's thoughts, words and ideas to enable the coachee to see things more clearly and, in doing so, to work out how to move forward (Bresser & Wilson, 2010).

3   TRANSPEER: ENHANCING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF RESEARCHERS

The Transnational Skills Programme to Enhance the Employability of Researchers (TRANSPEER) is a European funded project within the frame of ERASMUS+ (2017-1-SE01-KA203-034535). The starting point for TRANSPEER is that most researchers have a broad range of competencies and personal attributes that are in high demand both within and beyond the academy. Many researchers however do not fully appreciate their skill sets and are not practised at articulating them, resulting in unfulfilled potential and ambition. A better understanding of what they themselves have to offer and what employers (of all kinds) value would better equip researchers to navigate the employment market and achieve what they want from their careers. This is what TRANSPEER seeks to achieve.

The focus of the project is the production of a training programme to enhance the skills awareness and employability of a cross-disciplinary cohort of 36 participating researchers, drawn from the partner institutions (Karlstad University, Sweden; Inland Norway University of Applied Science, Norway; Liverpool John Moores University, UK; Institute of Chemical and biological Technology, Nova University of Lisbon, Portugal; and Polytechnic Institute of Santarém, Portugal). The overarching aims of the programme are to i) deliver generic skills training that will enhance researchers' employability for careers within and beyond academia;
ii) foster researchers' mobility through their participation in an international project that exposes them to different national research and funding structures and allowing them to learn together; and iii) provide support for development of coaching skills in supervisors, that will allow them to explore more holistically the needs of their PhD students, and will support building of strong research teams.

The programme will consist of four three-day training development events for the whole cohort of 36, with one held in each partner country; with several themes to be covered, including: career opportunities and pathways; research impact and utilisation; innovation; communications and pitching; personal development; mentoring and coaching; self-reflection and effectiveness; collaboration with non-academic partners; and conflict management.

The programme will thus include the development of the three fundamental coaching skills referred in the previous section, for the whole cohort. Initial and final self-assessment of these skills, and follow up of their application in research environment, will permit to build more evidence on the benefits of research coaching, and its future application in doctoral programmes.

4   CONCLUSION

Supervisor leader role efficacy is essential to support PhD students in the transference of knowledge, technical and soft skills into their future jobs. Coaching may be used to facilitate the leader role efficacy development of group leaders and supervisors. The purpose of coaching is to create awareness leading to self-directed action. As coach, the supervisor acts as a facilitator for unleashing the student potential and mobilization of internal resources to engage in intentional change and goal pursuit. The fundamental skills the supervisor must develop as coach are active listening, powerful questioning, and being present in the moment. The TRANSPEER project will allow to build evidence on the benefits of developing these skills in supervisors.

5   REFERENCES

Abreu, V. (2014). Coaching para a soberania pessoal. *Human, recursos humanos e gestão, 71*, 50.
Bresser, F., & Wilson, C. (2010). What is coaching? In J. Passmore & A. f. Coaching (Eds.), *Excellence in Coaching: The Industry Guide* (2nd ed., pp. 9-26). Londos: Kogan Page Lda.
Fahnert, B. (2015). On your marks, get set, go!-lessons from the UK in enhancing employability of graduates and postgraduates. *FEMS Microbiol Lett, 362*(19). doi: 10.1093/femsle/fnv150
Govaerts, N., Kyndt, E., Vreye, S., & Dochy, F. (2017). A Supervisors' Perspective on Their Role in Transfer of Training. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 28*(4), 515-552. doi: 10.1002/hrdq.21286
Higgins, N. C., McLaughlin, S. A., Rinne, T., & Stecker, G. C. (2017). Evidence for cue-independent spatial representation in the human auditory cortex during active listening. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A, 114*(36), E7602-e7611. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1707522114
Ladegard, G., & Gjerde, S. (2014). Leadership coaching, leader role-efficacy, and trust in subordinates. A mixed methods study assessing leadership coaching as a leadership development tool. *The Leadership Quarterly, 25*(4), 631-646. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.02.002
Passarelli, A. M. (2015). Vision-based coaching: optimizing resources for leader development. *Frontiers in Psychology, 6*, 412. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00412
Tennant, K., & Toney-Butler, T. J. (2017). Active Listening *StatPearls*. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing LLC.