Coaching & Mentoring: Between universalism, uniformity and conformity

Pauline Fatien, Sybille Persson, Judie Gannon

Guest editor's teams:

Pauline Fatien,
Grenoble Ecole de Management, France

Sybille Persson,
University of Lorraine, France

Judie Gannon,
Oxford Brookes Business School, United Kingdom

Coaching and mentoring are change practices that have gained traction within organizations to the point of becoming key in supporting managers, employees, leaders, and entrepreneurs in their development (Bozer & Delegach, 2019). The promises of change, at the individual, collective, and/or organizational levels, have quickly captivated discourses, imaginations, and organizational practices. At first glance, mentoring practices are described as "ubiquitous" (p. 6), with "formidable" figures (p. 5) (Stoeger et al., 2021, p. 5). While coaching, on the other hand, is said to be "triumphant" (Arnaud et al., 2022, p. 16), and "firmly established" (Haan & Nilsson, 2023, p. 1). This conquest has been achieved through an expansion into multiple institutional contexts, ranging from companies (start-ups to global corporations) to universities and public institutions. It has been facilitated by the involvement of various actors, including external and internal coaches, manager/leader coaches, as well as informal mentors and structured mentoring and coaching programs. Furthermore, this phenomenon has been observed across various geographical regions, spanning from North America to Asia. If the international dimension of coaching and mentoring is evident, the dynamics and modalities that underlie their growth, as well as their forms, impacts, and consequences, both within organizations and beyond, remain a field of study to be explored. This call for contributions aims to document, explore, and question the modalities, mechanisms, processes, and challenges of coaching and mentoring practices deployed across a range of organizational and entrepreneurial contexts.

Practices of support in the business and entrepreneurial environments, coaching and mentoring (C&M) are often described as closely related (Persson & Ivanaj, 2009). Both involve providing support within a professional context, with a spirit of benevolence and an intention for progress. However, they differ in terms of the expected skills and attitudes of both the facilitators and the individuals being supported (Garvey & Stokes, 2022). While a mentor is typically an experienced individual who shares their knowledge and expertise with a younger, less experienced "protégé" to assist them in their career journey (Houde, 1995; Ragins & Kram, 2007), a coach assumes a more external role, acting as an expert facilitator in a process of change rather than providing specific content. Throughout history, mentors have gained their value through the sharing of their experiences and exemplarity, passing them on to their "protégé" or "mentee." On the other hand, the effectiveness of a coach lies in a state of "active non-action" (Jullien, 1996, chapter 6), achieved through suspending judgment and employing a capacity to question without relying on preconceived answers for the coachee.

The rise and acceleration of the use of coaching and mentoring practices in organizations, at both national and international levels, have been attributed to their relevance in accompanying the evolution and globalization of capitalism (Vernazobres, 2006). Consequently, coaching is often described as being "at the service of capitalism" (Salman, 2021). Coaching and mentoring foster "soft" skills that are necessary to meet the demands of connectivity and coordination in dynamic and interconnected global environments. Simultaneously, these forms of support compensate for the effects of the expansion and financialization of capitalism, such as profitability pressures, increased anxiety, and a loss of meaning in work. They provide spaces (potentially redemptive) for individuals to gain distance and perspective. As both a symptom and a remedy (Arnaud et al., 2022) of the globalization of capitalism, these support practices are riffled with tensions that open numerous questions for researchers and practitioners (Gannon, 2021), rather than providing firm and definitive answers (Stoeger et al., 2021).

This indeterminacy is primarily linked to the state of knowledge on coaching and mentoring, whereby practices outpace theory (Bachkirova, 2018; Boyatzis et al., 2022; Stoeger et al., 2021), or the proliferation of models creates a deafening cacophony. In this regard, Ayache and Dumez (2021, p. 47) describe coaching as a "practice without theory" or as having an "excess of theory." This lack of theoretical foundation poses risks, as highlighted by Fatien, Louis, and Islam (2022), when coaching attributes (such as neutrality or benevolence) are advocated without a solid theoretical underpinning. Practitioners are then faced with an eclectic array of concepts and tools, which they may use and combine as they see fit, without necessarily

understanding their foundations or implications, especially within the complex context of organizations (Schulz, 2018). Similarly, Bachkirova and Borrington (2020) discuss various purported "good ideas" (such as well-being, the pursuit of happiness, or mindfulness) that can actually have detrimental effects when imported and applied to coaching. Likewise, in the field of mentoring, Stoeger, Balestrini, and Ziegler (2021) express concerns about the potential harm caused by mentorship programs lacking scientific grounding, a phenomenon they refer to as the "mentorship paradox" (p. 6). This highlights the discrepancy between the potential of a well-implemented program and the underperformance observed due to the lack of evidence based foundations.

In response to the instability surrounding coaching and mentoring practices, a dominant set of reactions aims to contain the excesses observed. Calls or efforts to redefine, clarify, and outline the boundaries, as well as proposed models, act as centrifugal forces working towards a tightening of practices. Formalization and professionalization are expected to enhance transparency, providing an explicit foundation in the face of accreditation, certification, and standardization processes, aiming to eliminate ambiguity and negate the inherent opacity of support practices (see, for example, St-Jean & El Agy (2014), in the context of mentoring). Serving as both enabling and constraining factors for professionals, these dynamics ultimately work towards the homogenization of practices, which tend to converge towards a uniformity that seeks to be universalist (Jullien, 2008). Illustrative of this is the rise of a global ethical code for coaches, mentors, and supervisors, signed by ten professional bodies in the field of coaching (EMCC et al., 2021). As a result, coaching and mentoring practices tend to resemble each other worldwide, favoring the dominant culture while potentially overlooking and/or ignoring other contexts (Bozer, Delegach & Kotte, 2021), as highlighted in the case of International Business Studies (IBS) (Agostini & Persson, 2022), HR development (Persson & Shrivastava, 2016), or networked innovation (Froehlicher & Barès, 2015).

In particular, Fatien Diochon and Nizet (2019, p. 603) emphasize the "insensitivity of coaching programs" to their contexts, leading to a similarity across organizations. Specifically, they explain the homogeneity of programs as a result of the predominance of power strategies in their implementation, disregarding the contextual factors. While contexts are sometimes utilized instrumentally, it is often only to serve political choices. Otherwise, they are neglected or biased. Ultimately, development programs for support and coaching serve more as vehicles for conformity or oppression (Shoukry & Cox, 2018) rather than emancipation. This is also the conclusion drawn from the study conducted by Gagnon and Collinson (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014), who posit the regulatory power of global programs as a source of identity prescription and uniform promotion of ideals in terms of leadership behavior.

However, the "more ambiguous, labile, and fluctuating form than what is officially presented" of coaching (Arnaud et al., 2022, p. 16), as well as the lack of conceptual distinction in mentoring (Chouki & Persson, 2016; Stokes et al., 2021), can also be viewed positively. According to Arnaud et al. (2022, p. 16), this "indeterminacy can be a source of creative responses to personal and professional challenges in the contemporary world, but also of subjective and societal impasses." In a similar vein, Nizet and Fatien (2012) invite exploration of the fruitful nature of coaching ambiguities, which can contribute to the malleability of the practice and its potential for success. For others too, the difficulty in defining practices can also be beneficial; it signifies the recognition of the situated dimension of practices and the importance of context, particularly in informal mentoring, which emerges from the interactional situation (Chouki & Persson, 2016). Thus, Stokes et al. (2020) suggest considering mentoring and coaching as "two sides of the same coin," with context playing an agentic role: practitioners draw from the typical posture of either coaching or mentoring depending on the learning, temporal, economic, or socio-cultural context. In this vein, Fatien, Louis, and Islam (2022) propose considering coaching through the practice lens (coaching-as-practice) to emphasize the significance of the situational and relational dimensions of a practice that cannot be reduced to dry descriptions, as it risks reifying individuals and environments. Therefore, approaching coaching-as-practice means recognizing that a plurality

of contexts, including cultural and political factors, cannot be disregarded in the context of support and coaching engagements.

Continuing on the delicate subject of ambiguity, especially when coaching and mentoring practices become internationalized, we cannot ignore the role and questions of language in these practices (Agostini & Persson, 2022). The issue then arises of the potential submission of coaching and mentoring practices to HR development policies and strategies that strive for similarity due to their global nature, under the auspices of "Care" (Tronto, 2010). This raises the concern of confusion between two concepts: the uniform, serving the economic, at the expense of the common, serving the political (Jullien, 2008). Furthermore, beyond the debated gap between face-to-face and online coaching (since the waves of COVID, which have disrupted conventional coaching practices (Graßmann & Schermuly, 2020)), we must consider the role of the local, in its own sensitivity, in the face of global digitalization deployed and propagated by algorithms, in the era of ChatGPT and similar technologies.

Based on these considerations, we invite theoretical and/or empirical contributions that document, explore and analyze the forces, dynamics, mechanisms at play in coaching and mentoring practices and their evolutions, as well as their effects and consequences. This includes the ways of conceptualizing the very nature of support and coaching on international and multicultural levels. The themes associated with this call include, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- ## C&M and Internationalization
    - What forms does the internationalization of coaching and mentoring practices take?
    - What are the convergences, divergences, and dissidences in the discourses and practices of coaching and mentoring?
    - How do coaching and mentoring programs manifest themselves internationally?
    - To what extent, and in what ways, do coaching and mentoring appear as tools in the internationalization policies and practices of companies?

- ## C&M and Context
    - To what extent and in what ways do coaching and mentoring practices and programs take into account contexts?
    - What relationships do coaching and mentoring have with their broader ecosystem, including the resources provided by languages?
    - Is there a "think global/act local" approach in coaching and mentoring, and/or is it a "think local/act global" approach?
    - How are societal, political, and environmental concerns and commitments central to coaching and mentoring?
    - What are the political dimensions of coaching and mentoring?

- ## C&M and Universalist ideology
    - What are the implicit, latent and unconsidered aspects of coaching and mentoring, representing ideals or ideologies that carry values with universal or even universalist claims?

- How can we identify unconsidered aspects in coaching and mentoring practices and discourses in the face of cultural biases (such as race, gender, religious orientation, sexual orientation, etc.)?

- What effective or potential contributions can coaching and mentoring make to reduce or reinforce discrimination in organizations?

- How can cultural diversity and identity claims be reconciled, both singularly and collectively, through coaching and mentoring?

- ## C&M and Standardization
    - What level of ambiguity (especially for coaching) and informality (particularly for mentoring) should be preserved in organizational coaching and mentoring practices?

    - How can compatibility be maintained in light of the ethical clarification efforts by professional federations, especially when they claim to have an international scope?

    - What about AI coaching/mentoring? Is it the pinnacle of the universal coach/mentor? Can coaching, especially when it involves financial transactions, sometimes fantastical, be integrated with AI in the era of ChatGPT? What is the role of language in coaching and mentoring?

Submission procedure

To provide developmental support to interested authors, the editors encourage them to submit their article proposal (a 1000-1500 word abstract with bibliography) and any potential questions they might have.

The final article submissions should be sent before **20 May 2024**, adhering to the publication standards of *Management international* (FR, EN, ES). Anticipated publication date: First semester of 2026.
For any communication, please use the dedicated email address: managementinternationalcm@gmail.com

Who are the guest editors of this call?

Pauline Fatien (PhD) is an educator and researcher in management with an international career in the United States, Colombia, and France. Her work explores ethical and power issues in organizational practices such as coaching. She is Associate Professor at Grenoble Ecole de Management (OWIC Research Group, France).

Sybille Persson (PhD, HDR) is a member of the CEREFIGE laboratory at the University of Lorraine (France). In addition to her work on coaching and mentoring, she draws on concepts proposed by philosopher and sinologist François Jullien to promote both strategic and ethical development of managerial practices in organizations.

Judie Gannon (PhD) is Director of doctoral programmes in Oxford Brookes Business School and a member of the International Centre for Coaching & Mentoring Studies (ICCAMS). She engages in research around mentoring initiatives and coaching, and their social impact.

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