

## Coaching, HRD, and OD: Towards Three ‘Silo’ Fields of Practice or a Single ‘Unified’ Profession?

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*During the past few years, the growth of an emergent ‘coaching industry’ in many countries has resulted in some scholars calling for the development of a ‘coaching profession.’ Yet, contemporary HRD and OD professionals conceive of coaching as a necessary area of expertise. This paper reports the results of a qualitative study of different conceptualizations and definitions of ‘coaching,’ OD, and contemporary ‘HRD’ as reported in the literature. Findings and implications are presented.*

Keywords: Coaching, Human Resource Development (HRD), Organization Development (OD)

Recent literature has reported the growth of an emergent ‘coaching industry’ in various countries which appears to be expanding rapidly and becoming an extensive ‘new’ field of practice. In 2003 *The Economist* estimated that organizations worldwide were spending upwards of \$1 billion providing coaches for their employees and that this was expected to rise to \$2 billion by 2005. Palmer (2003) claims between 25% and 40% of US Fortune 500 companies use executive coaches whilst Shuit (2005) suggests that the business of coaching in the United States alone has grown to \$1 billion per annum and estimates there are 40,000 coaches operating throughout the world. In 2006, the American based International Coach Federation (ICF) had about 11,000 people worldwide registered as members (ICF, 2007a). In particular, executive coaching, a variant of coaching, is becoming one of the fastest growing interventions in the professional development of managers, especially managers in large organizations (Gray & Goregaokar, 2007). A recent UK survey found that almost 90% of the 664 organizations surveyed had regularly used coaching by line managers with a further two-thirds saying they had used external practitioners to coach staff (CIPD, 2005). Throughout Europe coaching associations have been formed in countries such as Austria, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey, with several in the UK, the leading one being the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC). The current UK membership of EMCC, which comprises many variants of coaching including ‘executive coaches,’ ‘business or corporate coaches,’ and ‘life coaches,’ is approximately 2,700 and rising rapidly. Both the ICF and EMCC share many interests and concerns related to the state of coaching, specifically regarding the credentialing of coaches, quality assessment, professional conferences, governance and regulatory affairs (EMCC, 2007).

Given the growing popularity of the many variants of coaching and the increasing number of ‘professional’ coaches offering coaching services, Grant and Cavanagh (2004) suggest the ‘coaching industry’ has reached a key point in its maturation. This maturation, they argue, is driven by at least three interrelated forces: coaching experiences that have led to increasing awareness among coaches of the need to ground their practice in a solid theoretical understanding and empirically tested models; the increasing entry into coaching of individuals from various professional fields such as psychology, psychiatry, adult education, and organizational change and development; and, the increasing sophistication of management and human resource (HR) professionals who have become increasingly wary of what they perceive to be pseudo-qualified coaches. Grant and Cavanagh (2004) argue that coaching needs to “move from a service industry to a genuine *coaching profession*” (p. 3), but as yet the industry is far from meeting the basic requirements of a true profession because it lacks an holistic theoretical framework derived from a sound and sufficient empirical base and unique body of general knowledge (Vaartjes, 2005). Consequently, as they suggest, it is inappropriate for self styled ‘professional’ coaches to name or represent coaching as a profession when it is not yet fully established. In arguing the case for a move towards a genuine *coaching profession* that has an established clear identity, clear boundaries, and a unique body of empirically tested

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knowledge, they make the claim that “no existing profession holds a corner on the market of coaching knowledge” (p. 2). Additionally, Grant (2001) suggests coaching is distinctively different to and separate from other forms of professional learning facilitation and performance enhancement such as mentoring and training. In a similar vein, Clegg, Rhodes and Kornberger (2003) claim ‘business coaching’ differs from traditional business [and management] training and consulting. However, many professional practitioners and scholars operating within the fields of HRD and OD would challenge these claims and assertions.

### **Problem Statement and Theoretical Orientation**

The concept of coaching is not a new phenomenon and has been widely discussed in various fields including business and management (McLean, Yang, Kuo, Tolbert & Larkin, 2005). It first appeared in the management literature in the 1950’s as an approach to developing employees through a master-apprentice type of relationship (Evered & Selman, 1989), and has been variously defined as a process for improving problem work performance (Fournies, 1987); as a day to day hands on process of helping employees recognize opportunities to improve their performance and capabilities (Orth, Wilkinson & Benfari, 1987; Popper & Lipshitz, 1992); and, as a “process by which one individual, the coach, creates enabling relationships with others that make it easier for them to learn” (Mink, Owen, & Mink, 1993, p. 2). In more recent literature, coaching has been conceptualized as the facilitation of learning, and research has suggested that these terms are synonymous.

Coaching has been considered an important part of HRD practice for decades and has been recognized in numerous competency studies as a core role provided by HRD professionals (McLagan, 1999). The UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) recognizes coaching as an important role of HR professionals, and offers various postgraduate level professional qualifications in this area of HRD practice. Similarly, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) has acknowledged that coaching is a specific area of expertise that is required of workplace learning and performance professionals (Davis, Naughton & Rothwell, 2004) whilst Plunkett and Egan (2004, p. 558-60) identify ‘executive coaching’ as a “fast growing human resource development (HRD) role.” These authors define the ‘executive coach’ as “a trained HRD specialist who utilizes knowledge, skills and techniques from psychology and HRD-related fields in the design, development, and implementation of individually focused change efforts aimed at improving executives’ effectiveness, learning and performance.” Various other writers also perceive coaching in general to be an important organization development intervention practiced by both OD and HRD specialists (Cummings & Worley, 2005). It is also the case that for several decades OD has been conceptualized either explicitly or implicitly as a specific core component of HRD (See McLagan & Suhadolnik, 1989; Hamlin, 2004; Harrison & Kessels, 2004; Stewart, 1999) whilst Grieves (2003) argues Strategic HRD has its roots in OD and has emerged as the logical evolution and development of the OD tradition.

Organization Development (OD) has a longer history than HRD having been born as a ‘discipline’ in the late 1950s and having flowered in the 1960s (Albrecht, 1983). As Grieves (2003) has summarized, initial focus on T-groups and force field analysis was followed in the 1970s by a ‘theory of practice’ through intervention strategies and team development and ‘a proliferation of training approaches to personal growth and empowerment’ through self directed learning; the emergence of systems thinking approaches and quality management in the 1980’s; and downsizing and business process reengineering by value-driven approaches to facilitate visioning, organizational learning and problem solving in the interests of a collaborative management of the organization’s culture in the 1990’s. Throughout the whole of the ‘history’ of OD practitioners have incorporated traditional training, education and development’ and/or contemporary HRD processes, including coaching and mentoring-as part of their OD intervention strategies, increasingly so since the early 1990s. Hence, as fields of practice HRD and OD strongly overlap and are integrally linked. Therefore, the question arises as to whether coaching, HRD and OD should continue to be thought of as three separate ‘silo’ fields of practice rather than as core components of an emergent single ‘new’ genuine profession with its own emergent and developing unique body of conceptual and instrumental knowledge.

### **Research Questions**

Given the various claims and assertions about coaching being uniquely different from other forms of learning facilitation and change in organizational settings, the purpose of the current study was to review and compare the literature on ‘coaching,’ ‘HRD,’ and ‘OD’ in order to identify any distinctive differences in terms of their stated purpose and the processes deployed by practitioners. The research questions addressed were as follows: (1) What are the conceptual differences in the multiple descriptions, definitions and variants of coaching? (2) In light of

Question 1, do ‘professional’ coaches do anything that is significantly different to what many HRD and OD practitioners currently do, and does ‘professional’ coaching uniquely add value?

## Methodology

For the present qualitative study the authors adopted a neo-empiricist stance (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000) by assuming a critical realist ontology and epistemology falling somewhere between postpositivism and constructivism-interpretivism (Ponterotto, 2005). Critical realism in the social sciences is concerned with general questions about the nature of ‘social structure’ and the exploration of ‘intentional human agency’ and ‘real entities’ that have ‘causal efficacy’, have ‘an effect on behaviour’ and ‘make a difference’ (Fleetwood, 2005; Kemp, 2005). For critical realists there is an inherent subjectivity in the production of knowledge, but they use triangulation within a realist framework to assess the reliability and dependability of their qualitative analyses (Madill, Jordon & Shirley, 2000). This can involve the use of multiple researchers, research methods and sources to assess the consistency of findings (Flick, 1991) and, through such convergence, to provide evidence of the accuracy, credibility, confirmability and objectivity of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Madill et al., 2000). The mode of reality explored by the present study conforms with Fleetwood’s (2005) term ‘ideally real’ which refers to conceptual entities such as discourse, language, genres, ideas, beliefs, meanings, understandings, explanations, opinions, and concepts. The data used in this study were based on published research and textbook literature relating to coaching, HRD, and OD respectively. Articles were obtained from both academic and practice-based journals including: *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*; *International Journal of Evidence-based Coaching and Mentoring*; *Evidence-based Coaching*; *Journal of Workplace Learning*; *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*; *Human Resource Development International*; *Human Resource Development Quarterly*; *Human Resource Development Review*; *Career Development International*; *Industrial and Commercial Training*; *Journal of Management Development*; *Management Learning*; *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, *Public Administration Review*; *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. In addition, books and book chapters on coaching, the specific variants of coaching, and on human resource development and organization development were also explored.

The various identified conceptualizations (definitions) of coaching were clustered and categorized into particular categories (variants) as determined by the common meanings of the descriptive labels used by the respective authors; for example ‘executive coaching’. The purpose and processes of each and every definition within a category were then compared to identify the commonalities and differences. The research methods deployed were content analysis (Flick, 2002) and thematic analysis applied at the semantic level (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using first-level open coding (Flick, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) whereby the explicit and surface meaning of key words and part sentences were compared and contrasted for evidence of sameness, similarity and congruence. Based on the commonalities so identified, a ‘composite conceptualization’- *unified perspective* (Worrall, 2005)- was synthesized for each variant of coaching. These were then compared against a range of HRD and OD definitions with the aim of searching for commonalities and differences using content analysis, open coding and thematic analysis as before for this same purpose.

### *Ensuring Internal Consistency and External Validity*

A form of ‘investigator triangulation’ involving ‘multiple researchers’ was used in order to ensure and enhance the validity, plausibility, trustworthiness and credibility of the research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 1991; Madill et al., 2000). The comparative analyses were initially carried out independently by two of the authors, one of whom was based in the USA and the other in the UK. Their respective results were then compared and contrasted through several digital exchanges in order to arrive at a mutual confirmation of where their analyses and interpretations converged and diverged (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1991). Where discrepancies occurred these were resolved through further critical examination and digital exchange. The mutually agreed upon analyses were then scrutinized by the third author and then ultimately all three authors to reach a consensus on the findings.

## Results

This section briefly outlines the results from the data collection and data analyses according to each research question.

### *Addressing Research Question 1*

Using the results of the literature searches carried out by Grant (2001) and Joo (2005) for their respective studies into the ‘psychology of coaching’ and ‘executive coaching,’ a list of coaching definitions was collated and then supplemented with additional definitions resulting from our own search of other literatures. In total, 36 definitions were collated and grouped into different categories (variants) of coaching. The four variants included:

coaching, executive coaching, business coaching, and life coaching. The content of each definition was scrutinized to identify the particular intention/purpose and stated processes associated with this particular type of planned coaching intervention. These were highlighted in **bold** type and *italics* respectively, with bold referring to intentions/purposes and italics referring to processes. The key words describing the identified purpose and processes were then compared and contrasted against those describing the purpose and processes of the other definitions grouped within the same category (variant) of coaching, the aim being to search for commonalities. These were then used to synthesize a composite conceptualization for each category (variant) of coaching, the results of which are presented in Table 1. As can be seen from this table, the coaching process common to all four variants is that of providing *help* to individuals and organizations through some form of *facilitation* activity or intervention. In the case of ‘executive’ and ‘life’ coaching this is performed primarily (though not exclusively) in a *one-to-one* helping relationship. There is also a high degree of commonality between the variants of coaching regarding their respective purposes. Held in common to all variants is the explicit and implicit intention of helping individuals to improve their performance in various domains, and to enhance their personal effectiveness, personal development, and personal growth.

Table 1. *Synthesized [Unified Perspectives]/Composite Conceptualizations of the Variants of Coaching* [**Bold** = intended purpose; *Italics* = processes ]

<i>Categories/Variants of Coaching</i>	<i>Derived Unified Perspectives /Composite Conceptualizations of Coaching</i>
‘Coaching’	...is a <i>helping</i> and <i>facilitative process</i> that enables individuals, groups/teams and organizations to <b>acquire new skills, to improve existing skills, competence and performance, and to enhance their personal effectiveness or personal development or personal growth.</b>
‘Executive Coaching’	...is a <i>process</i> that primarily (but not exclusively) takes place within a <i>one-to-one helping and facilitative relationship</i> between a coach and an executive (or a manager) that enables the executive (or a manager) to <b>achieve personal-, job- or organisational-related goals</b> with an intention to <b>improve organizational performance.</b>
‘Business Coaching’	...is a <i>collaborative process</i> that <i>helps</i> businesses, owner/managers and employees <b>achieve their personal and business related goals</b> to ensure <b>long-term success.</b>
‘Life Coaching’	...is a <i>helping</i> and <i>facilitative process</i> -usually within a <i>one-to one relationship</i> between a coach and a coachee-which brings about an <b>enhancement in the quality of life and personal growth</b> of the coachee, and possibly a <b>life changing experience.</b>

In the case of ‘life coaching’ the personal growth aims may intentionally extend to include life changing experiences. The only significant difference between the four variants is the additional explicitly stated intention within the composite conceptualization of ‘Coaching’ relating to helping individuals, groups and/or organizations to acquire new skills and to improve existing skills/competencies which, as readers will appreciate, is a core purpose of contemporary HRD. As can be seen from Table 1, there are few substantive differences between the four variants of coaching in terms of their respective fundamental purposes and processes. Furthermore, many of the definitions and conceptualizations within each variant/category of coaching specifically embrace features strongly identified with other variants. For example, the ‘improvement and enhancement of a coachee’s quality of life, personal life, life experiences and personal growth’ which are some of the intended outcomes of ‘life coaching’ are also embedded within the professional ‘coaching’ definitions of Grant (2006), Grant and Cavanagh (2004) and the ICF (2007a), and of the ‘executive coaching’ definitions of Zeus and Skiffington (2000), Kilburg (2000), and Grant (2001). Similarly, the purpose of helping coachees ‘to develop and advance their organizations and achieve both business and personal goals,’ which is a key feature of ‘business coaching,’ is also in part a feature of the ‘executive coaching’ definitions of Kilburg (2000) and others and the professional ‘coaching’ definitions of Grant (2006) and the ICF (2007a). In light of these observations and the results of addressing Research Question 1, it would appear the weight of evidence suggests that indeed, *a coach, is a coach, is a coach, is a coach.*

#### *Addressing Research Question 2*

Firstly, an indicative range of HRD conceptualizations and definitions offered by various writers since the late 1980s, as found in the interrogated HRD-related journal and textbook literature, was collated. Each ‘definition’ was scrutinized to identify the respective intended purpose and processes of that particular HRD conceptualization, and these were then highlighted in **bold** and *italic* type face respectively, as was the procedure for coaching definitions. A total of 10 definitions of HRD were scrutinized and due to limitations of space, are included in narrative form:

Nadler and Nadler (1989), McLagan and Suhadolnik (1989), Gilley and Egglund (1989), Megginson, Joy-Matthews, and Banfield (1993), Ruona and Lyham (1999), Stewart (1999), Watkins (2000), McLean and McLean (2001), Hamlin (2004), and Harrison and Kessels (2004). Based upon a thorough review and comparison of these definitions, three definitions of HRD offered since 2001 appeared to be composite conceptualizations that encapsulate the core meaning of most of the definitions that precede them. These include: HRD is '*any process or activity* that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to **develop adults' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction**, whether for **personal** or **group/team** gain, or for the **benefit of an organization**, community, nation or, ultimately, the whole of humanity' (McLean & McLean, 2001); HRD 'encompasses *planned activities* and *processes* designed to **enhance organizational and individual learning, develop human potential, maximize organizational effectiveness and performance**, and help bring about **effective and beneficial change** within and beyond the boundaries of organizations' (Hamlin, 2004); and, HRD as an organizational process 'comprises the skilful *planning* and *facilitation* of a variety of formal and informal *learning and knowledge processes and experiences*, primarily but not exclusively in the workplace, in order that **organisational progress and individual potential can be enhanced** through the competence, adaptability, collaboration and knowledge-creating activity of all who work for the organisation' (Harrison & Kessels, 2004).

To examine the range of conceptualizations and definitions of Organization Development (OD) offered since the 1960's, the researchers drew upon Egan's (2002) review of literature and then expanded the range of definitions to include additional scholars. Applying the same approach to analysis, the researchers carefully reviewed definitions and highlighted the intended purpose of OD in bold and the processes associated with OD in italics. A total of 29 definitions of OD were examined and ultimately, a composite conceptualization was derived. Due to space limitations, only the composite conceptualization is offered here. This composite conceptualization is based upon the analysis which revealed a constant and common purpose over the decades as well as the emergence of and great emphasis on individual and organizational learning and development since the early 1990's. The composite conceptualization suggests that: *Organization development is any systematic process or activity which increases organizational functioning, effectiveness and performance through the development of an organisation's capability to solve problems and bring about beneficial change and renewal in its structures, systems, and culture, and which helps and assists people in organizations to improve their day to day organizational lives and well being, and enhances both individual, group, and organizational learning and development.*

## Discussion and Limitations

The extent of the commonalities existing between the various conceptualizations of the four variants of coaching identified in Table 1 and the three contemporary 'definitions' of HRD that encapsulate the core meanings of definitions that preceded them, along with the composite conceptualization of OD developed after an exhaustive review of 29 OD definitions, purposes, intentions, and processes as revealed by the present study suggests 'professional' coaching is substantively the same as many aspects of contemporary HRD and OD. However, as previously mentioned, various writers on coaching and the emergent 'coaching industry' perceive coaching as being distinctly different to both 'training' and 'consulting' (Clegg, Rhodes & Kornberger, 2003; Grant, 2001). In making their arguments these writers do not have appeared to have compared the learning processes associated with coaching against the innovative approaches to individual, group and organizational learning associated with much contemporary HRD and OD practice, such as learner-centred learning, work-based learning, work-place learning, learning facilitation, and action learning.

From first hand experience, two of the present authors can attest to the fact that for many years several of these innovative learning methods have been key features of professional trainer training and management training in the UK. Most of these approaches are examples of participative and non-directive learning where learners have an opportunity to base their development on real-time professional experiences at their place of work and through their work; they are also examples of *critical HRD methods* as discussed recently by Rigg, Stewart and Trehan (2007). In their arguments regarding business coaching, Clegg et al. (2003) also compare and contrast the process of coaching against traditional [*expert*] consulting which they claim is focused on providing advice and developing solutions rather than helping clients solve their own problems. Yet for several decades many professional trainers, developers and other HRD and OD practitioners in the UK have engaged in providing *collaborative* consulting services to 'clients' in their roles as internal or external 'training consultants,' 'learning consultants' and 'organisational change consultants.' Furthermore, 'organizational change and development' has been a core component of HRD practice and research for almost two decades and contemporary OD practice has tended to adopt an action research perspective that is highly participatory and collaborative (i.e. Grievies, 2003; McLean, 2006). However, it does not

appear that some of these scholars have compared coaching with these areas and aspects of contemporary HRD and OD business.

In light of the above observations and the findings, it can readily be seen how the emergent field of 'professional coaching' could fit within the existing and firmly established broader fields of HRD and OD. The results of this comparative analysis suggest all four variants of coaching could be seen as variants of HRD and OD to a greater or lesser extent. Hence, this finding raises a question regarding the feasibility of the call by some scholars and coaching associations (i.e. ICF and EMCC) for a move towards creating a *coaching profession* with a clear identity, clear boundaries, and a unique common body of empirically tested knowledge that can be sharply differentiated from other related professions, not the least of which are the HRD and OD professions.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

It is possible that despite our reliance upon syntheses of the literature that have included coaching, HRD, and OD definitions, there are additional conceptualizations of coaching, HRD, and OD that we may not have had access to and therefore may not have been included in our study. As Joo (2005), Weinberger (1998) and Egan (2002) have acknowledged, there are multiple definitions of coaching, HRD and OD that have been advanced and we have not been exhaustive in including them in our analysis. The definitions we have used represent some of the most commonly cited conceptualizations of coaching, HRD, and OD in the US, UK, The Netherlands, Australia and more broadly, yet may not be inclusive of non-Western perspectives.

### **Conclusions and Implications for Coaching, HRD and OD Research and Practice**

If accepted, these observations would imply all of the variants of 'professional' coaching should also be perceived to a greater or lesser extent as HRD and OD roles. However, from our experience many if not most coaches who identify and style themselves professionally as 'coaches', 'executive coaches', 'business coaches' or 'life coaches' may not perceive themselves to be HRD or OD professionals, may not have an interest in becoming one, nor may possess the foundational knowledge and skills associated with HRD or OD practice perhaps due to them having come from very different professional backgrounds such as 'business management,' 'consulting psychology' and 'psychiatry'. It is also possible that they view HRD and OD only in terms of traditional training or as a branch of adult education and adult learning, or as a minor part of human resource management or personnel management.

This poses both a dilemma and challenge for 'coaching,' 'HRD,' and 'OD,' scholars and practitioners. As Chalofsky (2004) observes, the firmly established field of HRD study and practice rests on three constructs; *people, learning, and organizations*. It could also be argued that OD similarly rests upon these constructs. But, as can readily be seen from the various definitions of the variants of coaching explored by the present study, 'professional' coaching also rests on these three same constructs. Therefore, if 'professional' coaches and researchers within the emergent 'coaching industry' support a move towards the creation of a *coaching profession* with its own unique body of empirically tested knowledge, as called for by Grant and Cavanagh (2004), and if the fast growing HRD role of 'executive coach' and of 'coach' and 'business coach' continue to expand, including a rapid expansion of the concomitant body of coaching related HRD research, significant problems of differentiation will inevitably arise. Resolving such problems could prove to be a serious challenge for the firmly established and 'emergent' fields of practice. However, one way forward would be to move towards the creation of a shared and integrated field of study/disciplinary base that would be common to the 'HRD,' 'OD,' and 'coaching' fields of practice. We suggest a suitable label for such a disciplinary base to which all 'HRD,' 'OD,' and 'coaching' professionals could readily subscribe would be that of 'People and Organization Development.' This is similar to the label used by Chalofsky (2004) to describe the disciplinary base/framework-the "body of knowledge and teaching that HRD practitioners study to learn about or advance in the field" (p. 423).

In light of the findings, it seems as though dialogue is needed among scholars and professionals in HRD and OD that would need to take into account the serious implications of the current developments taking place in the emergent and growing 'coaching industry. If indeed coaching is considered a core competence of HRD and OD professionals and a recognized area of HRD and OD expertise as this study suggests, it is possible that the growing interest in the creation of a separate and distinct *coaching profession* could well impact adversely upon the longer term viability of the HRD and OD fields. However, an argument could be made for the creation of an all embracing genuine *people and organization development profession* with its own unique yet eclectic body of empirically tested knowledge to which all 'developers' who identify themselves as contemporary HRD, OD or coaching/mentoring professionals would wish to belong. Such a development would be an advantage to HRD and OD professionals in the UK who, in the mind's eye of most managers and even many HRD and OD professionals, are too strongly identified as HR people operating as traditional trainers and administrators. Similarly in the US, because HRD and OD related postgraduate qualification programs are often housed predominantly within schools of education in US

universities as opposed to business schools as is largely the case in the UK, the subjects of HRD and OD can be perceived in the minds of many if not most managers as a 'specialized form of education and instruction' which is not directly concerned with 'business and organizations.' This can create 'credibility' problems for many HRD and OD professionals in the US who experience difficulties in gaining access and acceptability within organizations, particularly private sector companies. Yet, in contrast, self identified 'executive coaches' do not appear to suffer from this same handicap. Perhaps the findings of the present study provide a timely wake-up call for HRD and OD professionals to consider the potential threats and opportunities associated with the emergent 'coaching industry' as it relates to the longer term viability of the study and practice of HRD and OD.

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