

Invitation to participate



**MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY
INVITATION LETTER**

The 'grey space': How can I and other coaches improve the practice of dealing with ethics and managing boundaries, in the grey space, when working with clients experiencing stress?

'You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.'

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

I put forward that stress is a wicked problem. "An entry point for an inquiry into a wicked problem is usually some wake-up call, crisis event, a new idea, or shift in social expectation" (Brown, 2010, p.65). I propose that now is the time when we may be seeing such an entry point. According to research, stress is at an all-time high, affecting every area of our society.

“Stress occurs when pressure exceeds your perceived ability to cope”
(Palmer & Cooper, 2013).

It is suggested that engaging in coaching holds less perceived stigma than that of therapy/counselling. Consequently, it could be argued that individuals may see coaching as being more approachable and therefore being amenable to facing challenges and concerns earlier, such as stress, prior to the difficulties becoming clinical (Palmer & Cooper, 2013). However, it is here that the boundaries between therapy and coaching may become blurred, entering a grey space. Therefore, considerations of ethics of practice as a professional practitioner and the need to explore, to ensure best practice.

Gherardi (2009) proposes that, once we deem activities as practices, such as strategies for the management of stress, this then legitimises and normalises the accountability of various conducts. What one “produces in their sustained practice is not only work, but also the (re)production of society” (p.536). I view coaching as such a practice; one that can support the (re)production of society in mitigating and managing stress, and in the development of resilience. Yet, this brings with it a huge responsibility for what we deem as practices to be ethical and of best practice.

When investigating the literature on how to navigate the grey space, I found a mixed consensus. Such as: Sime & Jacob (2018) explored coaches’ perceptions of roles, borders and boundaries, resulting in more questions being raised regarding the boundary between coaching and therapy; calling for acceptance from both professions to acknowledge overlap, and suggesting that focus should be continued and transparent, and for judgement-free dialogues between the two professions. Furthermore, they called for detailed and robust research surrounding the experience of “how coaches work, the roles they adopt, how they experience boundaries” (p.49).

Purpose

Little is known about the lived experience of how coaches navigate the ethical and boundary issues when working with a coachee on stress management or when a coachee presents that they have or may be having a mental health issue. I surmise that this is not a one size fits all approach, with much being left to the coach's discernment. This research is to collaboratively explore the differences and similarities of how coaches navigate the grey space.

Aims

To better understand how I and other coaches can enhance our own practices and management of the grey space while engaging in stress management, resilience and personal development coaching, through shared knowledge and collaborative learning. To improve the management of boundaries and ethics both for coaches within practice and to safeguard coachees/clients.

Through an action research inquiry, with the incorporation of a retrospective critical reflection, autoethnographic personal reflexive narrative, and the consideration of discourse analysis, I will look to address questions such as: "How do I and other coaches navigate the terrain that comes with working with coachees who are experiencing stress, when working with clients who bring content that sits close to the 'grey space'?"

There will be 2 workshops held (virtual or face to face), which will take place between March 2020, and then again meeting once more between July-Aug 2020.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to participate because you are a coach who's work includes one or more of the following elements stress management, developmental, transitional and or transformational coaching.

Do I have to take part?

'It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.'

'Withdrawal will be possible up to one month after the final workshop/interview, after which time, the data will be anonymised and amalgamated into the analysis'

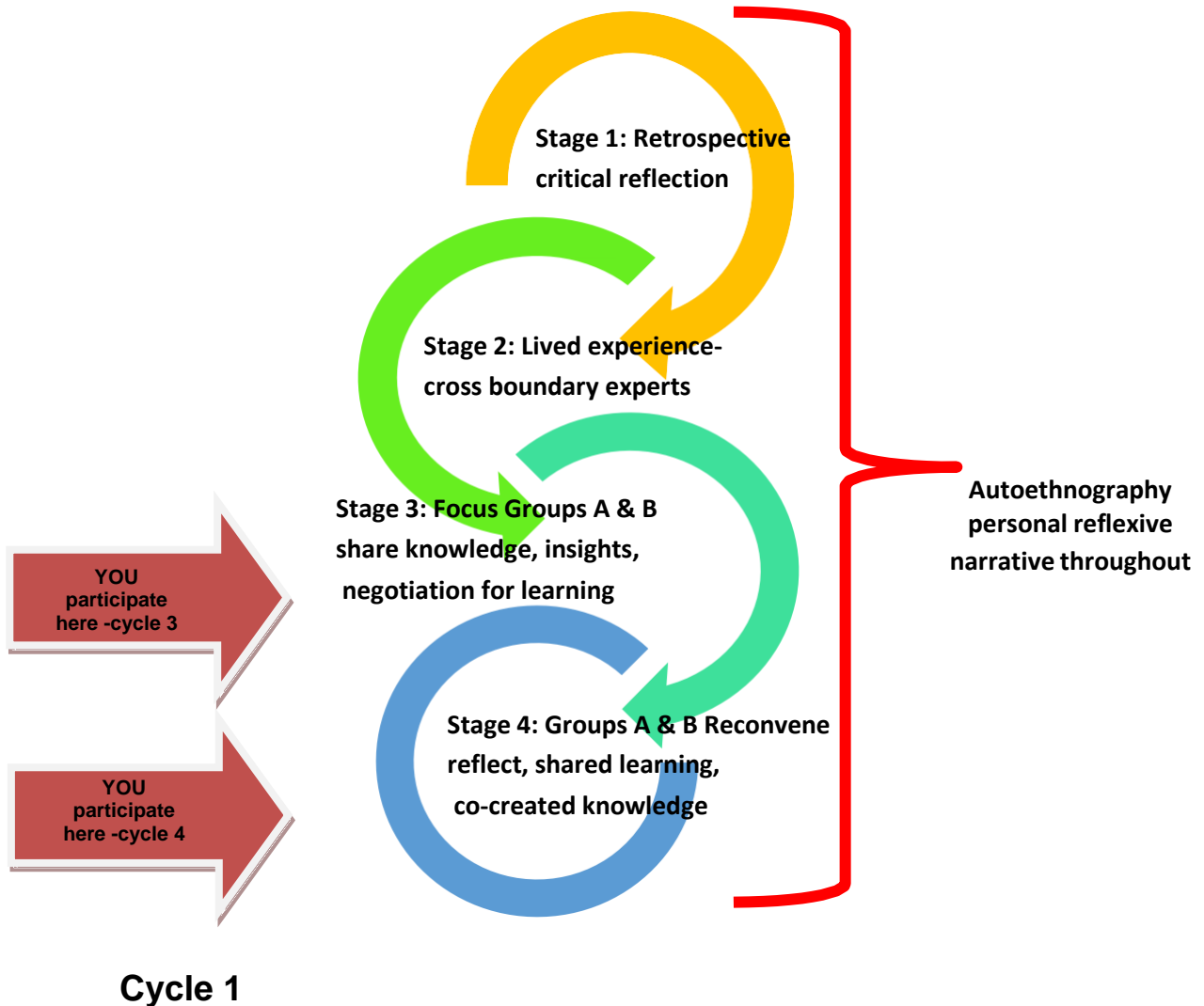
What will happen to me if I take part?

You will take part in 2 workshops held (virtual or face to face TBC), which will take place between March 2020, and then again meeting once more between July_Aug 2020.

These workshops form part of my wider action research piece.

Action research is believed to have the capacity to assist us in making sense of our lives because it moves beyond the surface structure of method (while still regarding it as important), to look deeply at the underlying configuration of our values and intentions of our lived experience (McNiff, 2002). Overall action research is a flowing set of principles used for everyday practice: a) to understand what has happened; b) to plan for actions for the future; c) to perform those actions; and d) to reflect on what has occurred post implementation. These steps forming multiple cycles, which often overlap, and do not always follow a neat and tidy sequence (Githens, 2015).

Figure 1: Research Design Cycles and Themes



An overview of how I have so far navigated and experienced the grey space, both personally and professionally. Creating a starting point from which I open up a dialogue with other practitioners.

Cycle 2

Looks to open up critical conversations (McNiff, 2002) with several cross boundary experts to discuss, compare and contrast our lived experiences of the grey space and the navigation of it. Also, exploring whether there may be contrasting positions held by each cross boundary expert, in addition to acting as critical friends (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). I define cross boundary experts as individuals who are established experts in the

field of coaching psychology, who have a foot in both camps; their other foot being in clinical, counselling psychology, psychotherapy and therapy.

Cycle 3

Concurrent with Cycle 2, I propose to run workshops with a range of coaches as co-inquirers exploring our lived experience of the greyspace, facilitating parallel face-to-face workshops groups, each ranging from five to ten people; of coaches from various backgrounds and as well as coaching psychologists

Cycle 4

This cycle will conclude the workshops. The aims of this final cycle are: to reflect on how the process has influenced each other's practices; to share possible insights, and how we may have changed and gained alternative ways of thinking about the grey space as a result of workshops; and reflecting on the various forms of negotiated data, and the data I have gathered and analysed from both the focus groups and the cross boundary experts.

All the conversations during Cycles 2, 3 and 4 will be recorded and transcribed, adhering to ethical considerations with consideration of conducting DA on the transcripts for analysis. DA sees language as an instrument from which social and psychological life is constructed (Parker, 1994).

Autoethnography

Like a thread running through the research, I will draw on autoethnography, which will enable me to capture my experience, as a researcher and a practitioner; reflecting on my understanding of practice and bringing new questions to light to share with the group.

What do I have to do?

Coaches/Coaching Psychologist: Will be participating in a workshop setting, where my role is one of facilitation. Here we will meet face to face or virtually via zoom (max number of 10 per group) 2 times over 4-5 month period.

Participants will be asked to write a 500-word reflection piece on how they navigate the boundaries between therapy and coaching when working with clients who are undergoing stress management coaching, which I will add to the data, and if they feel comfortable can share with the group on our first meeting.

I will begin the workshop by sharing my lived experience, which will be gained through my own reflection. The aim is to share our different and similar experience which we can learn from and take back to our own practices.

There will be a request to keep a journal after each workshop on how the insights gain during the workshop may influence your day to day work as a practitioner.

On the final meeting, I will share with the groups the Cross-Boundary Experts experiences and recommendations. My hope is that we come away with a deeper understanding of ourselves as practitioners, and the ability to better navigate this terrain, which benefits our clients and our practices.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There is no known risk in participating in this project. Except for contributing your time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Through participation in this study you will gain deeper understanding of yourself as a practitioner and your practice. Furthermore, there is a hope that each individual participating will gain shared learning, through each

other's shared lived experiences. Thus, a further development of yourself as an ethical practitioner.

'We hope that participating in the study will help you. However, this cannot be guaranteed.'

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

'All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is used will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it. However, if you wish to be named to recognise your contribution please let me know'

Consent forms and transcripts/recordings will be filed away separately in secure, locked cabinets for two years, in order to protect the confidentiality of participants, as well as for compliance with GDPR.

'The University has a Safeguarding policy and the research team members are guided by professional codes of conduct which requires to us to report any information to the appropriate authority where a person may be at risk of serious harm. We will always endeavour to discuss this with you first.'

What will happen to the results of the research study?

All conversations/interviews will be video recorded and audio recorded once transcribed and there will be consideration of conducting discourse analysis on the transcripts for analysis. Extracts presented will be representative of the data cohort. Various extracts will be presented, to demonstrate the relevant themes, with one or more co-inquirer extracts presented in each theme. I will then look to make a comparison between the groups in order to evaluate the similarities and distinctions between the themes that may emerge. My reporting will be shared with the groups, with both groups receiving both sets of data.

Who has reviewed the study?

This committee is the Middlesex University, Institute for Work Based Learning.

Contact for further information

For further information please contact myself or my supervisor.

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Thank you for deciding to take part in this study!

Please would you sign and date the Participant Information Sheet below, you will be given a copy of *information sheet and a signed consent form to keep*

Participation number: _____

Date: _____

Sign: _____