

Developing academics as coaches: Preparing the future-ready graduate

Keisha Valdez, EdD, FSEDA

Abstract

Globally, tertiary institutions should be thinking beyond the exigencies of covering the curricula to prepare students to traverse the increasingly unpredictable societies in which they are expected to succeed. Today's students must be prepared beyond academic content. Penprase (2018) advocates for a focus on the soft skills that would help graduates to assess and navigate the ever evolving and increasingly competitive job market and workforce. How can 'soft', transferable skills be developed when both students and staff are already burdened fulfilling the mandates of what is expected of them? Perhaps the answer lies in utilising and adapting existing academic related (or research related) advising approaches. My interest in exploring a *culturally adaptive* coaching approach for academic advisors led to the conceptualisation and design of a three-part professional development workshop series for nine lecturers and academic advisors from one campus of a regional university situated in the Caribbean.

The initial planning for the workshop series involved identifying and curating foundational information and definitions, such as what constitutes coaching, its tenets, and an operational model that participants could adopt in their practice. Those key areas were fleshed out, and my local university partners, two educational developers (one who also is an adjunct instructor), provided feedback on the curated material. My two partners, who also were participants, assisted in finalising the three-part workshop's objectives, and with the recruitment and retention of additional participants. They also provided insights to the institutional and national cultural context that can influence how the content is received and applied.

The workshop series was held fully online with the aid of the university's learning management system and a web conferencing system. For each of the three modules I facilitated weekly synchronous sessions via web conferencing where we explored the module content through discussion and other experiential learning activities. Between sessions participants reviewed pertinent articles and videos and worked in pairs or triads to practice new skills or reflect on the application of content within their respective roles or departments.

There were several opportunities for workshop participants to provide feedback on their experiences and coaching development throughout and at the conclusion of the workshop. The three areas of impact are identified as: internalisation of coaching concepts; mindfulness of the coaching role and coaching relationships; and adoption of fundamental coaching practices and/or process. In summary, the implications of this Academics as Coaches workshop are two-fold. Firstly, the potential for coaching to be a game-changer in higher education particularly within emerging nations is worth deep investigating. Secondly, this project illuminates the importance of educational developers who are working with staff in the global south or other non-Western geographies to ensure their professional development materials are mindful, respectful and reflective of cultural and institutional priorities.

Penprase, E. (2018). The fourth industrial revolution and higher education. In N. Gleason (Ed.), *Higher Education in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution* (pp. 207-229). Singapore: Palgrave-MacMillan.