

**Advancing Emergency Medical Leadership Through Coaching – Results of an Action
Research Study**

By

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Abstract

This article describes an action research study which examined the effectiveness of professional coaching relationships as a means to create greater leadership capacity among emergency medical services (EMS) leaders in Canada. A review of current literature explored the definition of coaching, generated an understanding of organizational change leadership, and investigated organizational culture and the culture of EMS. Adhering to all relevant ethical considerations and standards, data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative action research techniques, including surveys and participant journaling. Based on the research findings, it has been concluded that the EMS Chiefs of Canada can influence the development of EMS leadership capacity by supporting coaching as a developmental instrument. The study recommendations have identified the critical factors necessary for successful coaching outcomes, recognized coaching as an under utilized and misunderstood leadership tool, and indicated that EMS leaders find value in coaching and coach-like leadership.

The Opportunity and Its Significance

While admired the world over for its universality of access, the Canadian health care system is currently faced with a number of significant and complicated challenges - increasing health care costs, increasing wait times in emergency rooms, delays for medical, surgical and diagnostic interventions, and limitations to both funding and human resources. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is not immune to these far reaching problems. As an integral component of the health care continuum and potential solution to many of the problems, EMS providers and their leaders must design innovative and sustainable solutions working in collaboration with all aspects of the health system.

The EMS Chiefs of Canada indicated that there are over 2 million requests for EMS annually across the country.¹ Some 14,000 paramedics throughout Canada answer these calls for help.² As one of the first points of entry into the health system, the services and care provided by paramedics often influence patient outcomes. Effective partnerships between emergency and health services providers at the earliest point of intervention are an increasingly important strategy. As a mobile health care system, EMS provides health care in the public safety environment in close partnership with both Fire Rescue Services and Police Services. As

¹ EMS Chiefs of Canada [EMSCC], 2006

² Paramedic Association of Canada [PAC], 2007 1

society's social safety net, EMS creates an access point for patients who require re-entry back into the health system, social services, mental health services, or any other service that may meet the patient's unique needs.

Given the challenges, the critical and dynamic nature of EMS work and the influence that EMS can have on other components of the public safety and health systems, it is imperative that EMS leaders across the country be well prepared for the future.

In 2006, the EMS Chiefs of Canada released a white paper entitled *The Future of EMS in Canada: Defining the Road Ahead* which outlined the policy direction for Canadian EMS leaders in a number of areas. Central to this document was the development of leadership education programs:

EMS leaders need to be developed through higher-level EMS education programs that incorporate learning objectives regarding research, quality improvement, and management. To create effective leadership, EMS will require investment in human resources. EMS must provide graduate-level opportunities to study the field of health promotion, *leadership* and organizational systems (p. 38).

Key to the development of EMS leaders is innovative and supportive methods that focus on individuals, teams, and organizations including the development of leadership capacity through coaching. Yet the use of leadership coaching within EMS Service provider organizations has historically been underutilized.

In his research project entitled *Building Leadership Capacity in Emergency Medical Services: Developing Future Leaders*, Joe Acker (2009) came to the following conclusion:

Interestingly, 81% of the survey respondents identified teaching, coaching, and mentoring others as a way in which they currently manage their own learning, whereas only 36% used an executive coach or had a mentor themselves. The leaders who were surveyed also identified developing and mentoring others as the fifth most important leadership competency. There is obviously a dichotomy at play, since EMS leaders value coaching, but do not engage in it themselves. (p. 125)

Given the significance of the challenges that EMS systems face across the country and the perceived coaching void that exists among EMS leaders, the research questions explored by this study on behalf of the EMS Chief's of Canada investigated were:

1. How can the EMS Chiefs of Canada and its membership exercise coaching as a tool to help advance the development of emergency medical services leadership in Canada?
 - a. Do Canadian EMS leaders support and see value in leadership coaching?
 - b. What are the opportunities for leadership coaching in Canadian EMS systems?
 - c. How do Canadian EMS leaders introduce a culture of coaching within their organizations?

EMS Leadership Challenges

Throughout Canada, EMS systems face significant obstacles in their delivery of emergency health services. Increasing call volumes, increasingly more complicated medical cases, decreasing funding, labour disputes, and planning for and responding to specific demands on the health system, such as the H1N1 pandemic, have all contributed to the compounding demands placed upon EMS systems and their leaders. Given the EMS landscape in Canada, it has never been more important for leaders to reinvent their leadership approach and exercise new and innovative solutions to emerging issues.

Demographic trends in Canada suggest a decline in skilled practitioners in fields like EMS in the near future.³ Any decrease in operational or street human resources and the eventual retirement of greater numbers of EMS leaders creates a somewhat compounding problem. Given the significant issues facing health care and EMS systems throughout the nation and the rather substantial human resource deficit that may be pending, it has never been more important for current EMS leaders to invest in the future of EMS—the future EMS leader.

Leadership development in EMS is largely undervalued. More emphasis has always been placed upon continuing medical education and EMS leaders are often promoted from within the ranks of the organization after a number of years practicing on the street. Funding for continuing leadership education is often difficult or impossible to secure given the financial constraints facing EMS administrators.

³ EMSCC, 2006.

Interestingly, this lack of focus on leadership development is not contained to just Canadian EMS organizations. Ambulance systems in United Kingdom have also recognized a void in the area of leadership development in their systems. As part of the National Health Service review of the London Ambulance Service entitled *Taking Healthcare to the Patient: Transforming the NHS Ambulance Services*, the Department of Health (2005) found that “investment in human resources and development in some ambulance services is comparatively low, largely as a result of capacity, but sometimes because of organizational priorities” (p. 11). As part of the recommendations contained within the report, the Department of Health indicated “leadership and organizational management expertise must receive an increased level of attention and investment if the ambulance service is to fulfil its potential” (p. 11).

The Canadian EMS profession has no clearly defined leadership competency profile for EMS leaders, including chiefs, deputy chiefs, directors, managers, or supervisors. Without a clear understanding of the required competence for EMS leaders, the foundation for the development of a specific leadership skill set is somewhat fragile.

Central to the challenges that face EMS leaders today is the management and leadership of change initiatives. Canadian EMS practitioners are in a unique and privileged position. In their time of need, patients and their families call upon EMS professionals to care for them and their loved ones and to courageously provide medical care to victims of violence, tragedy, and misfortune. On account of their unique and specialized skill set and because the profession attracts individuals who are inherently dedicated, action orientated, and problem solvers, EMS professionals find themselves in an admirable position – being invited by the health system to help find creative solutions including potential increases to their scope of practice to address some of the challenges inherent in the health system.

The Organizational Context – EMS Chiefs of Canada

The EMS Chiefs of Canada was formed in 2002, with the mission “to advance and align EMS leadership in Canada” (EMSCC, 2004a, p. 4). The organization was founded by a group of dedicated and passionate senior EMS leaders throughout Canada who wished to share expertise and collaborate to provide a single, unified, national voice for EMS. The general membership of the EMS Chiefs of Canada is leadership professionals from across the country who represent the various service delivery models that exist - large and small municipal EMS services, fire department-based EMS services, hospital and health region EMS providers, provincially funded

and operated systems, large and small private ambulance operators, air ambulance providers, and the Department of National Defence Canadian Forces medical responders.

The vision of the EMS Chiefs of Canada (2004a) states, “We are an organization that shares resources and provides services that support EMS leaders in developing a national direction for sustainable, progressive emergency medical services” (p. 3). Their *Framework, Policies, and Guidelines*, identifies five areas of focus including information, communications, strategic leadership, development, and recognition (EMSCC, 2004a, p. 5). This research project was sponsored and endorsed by the president of the EMS Chiefs of Canada with the understanding that it would focus on the areas of strategic leadership and development in support of the policy framework document.

Leadership competency within EMS is often limited by the opportunities and resources made available by mentors as new leaders are developed. Traditionally, EMS supervisors/managers were provided mentoring by those that had gone before. Leadership coaching, therefore, is a foreign concept to many EMS leaders and, as such, only sparsely utilized (Acker, 2009). With all of the challenges that lie ahead for EMS and all the challenges that are currently facing the health care system, leadership coaching will play a critical role in the development of future EMS leaders and of the profession itself.

The Culture of Emergency Medical Services

The culture of EMS is largely a paramilitary one adopted from partners in public safety: fire rescue services and police services. This paramilitary approach serves to provide support and confidence to the EMS crews on the street who typically practice with little supervision and with a tremendous amount of responsibility.

A key element that characterizes the culture of an emergency services organization is the symbology associated with the organization and the work that it does. In EMS, the Star of Life is a symbol that represents the six distinct phases of an EMS response: detection, reporting, response, on scene care, care in transit, and transfer to definitive care (Duncan, n.d., p. 2). The snake and staff in the centre of the symbol portray the staff of Aesculapius who, according to Greek mythology, was the son of Apollo and the mortal maiden Coronis; Apollo was told to instruct his son in the ways of medicine and healing (p. 1).

The EMS uniform is another critical symbol for EMS practitioners, representing a sense of authority and responsibility that is recognized by general public and our partners in public safety and health care. The uniform creates, in the wearer, an identity, a sense of belonging, a sense of commitment and dedication, and a sense of pride (Federal Emergency Management Agency, n.d.). The uniform is more than just an outfit; wearing it actually gives paramedics the privilege to enter, albeit briefly, into the lives of the people for whom they provide care. It signifies responsibility, trust, and knowledge in the eyes of the patient.

In relations to EMS leadership, acknowledging and understanding the complexities of the paramilitary culture currently found in emergency services will offer clarity and direction around how to further shift the EMS culture to one that accepts the notion of leadership coaching. In EMS, there is a pervading sense of loyalty and respect for the senior administrators. If these leaders can be influenced to support coach-like leadership, it is expected that the cultural transition to a style of leadership that includes coaching might be possible.

Research Approach and Methodology

This action research project was intended to uncover the potential of coaching to advance the leadership capability of EMS leaders and attempt to answer the question: *How can the EMS Chiefs of Canada exercise executive coaching to help advance the development of emergency medical services leadership in Canada?*

The Participants

The EMS participants in this study were current EMS leaders practicing in large urban centres across Canada who held who held senior leadership roles in their organizations (i.e., Chief, Director, Deputy Chief, Superintendent, or Supervisor). These leaders were surveyed in Phase I on their understanding of coaching and their past experience within coaching relationships and leadership coaching. The five EMS leader participants in Phase II (leadership coaching) were selected by their respective Chiefs based on their role in the organization and their willingness to participate in a structured coaching relationship and included mid- to senior-level leaders with five or more years' experience in a leadership role.

The coach participants were required to meet a number of criteria including depth of experience in professional coaching within organizations, an International Coach Federation credential, or be

in progress toward obtaining an International Coach Federation credential, and be willingness to participate in the study pro bono publico. The coach participants were not required to have any background in emergency medical services and were not limited by geography.

Approach and Methodology

The research phases and data collection method are outlined below:

Table 1 *Research Phases and Tools*

Phase	Tool	Description
Phase One	National Survey	Sent to the EMS Chiefs of Canada membership–171 members nationwide
Phase Two	Client Pre-Coaching Survey	This survey included all of the same elements as the national survey in order to collect the base understanding of the participants’ knowledge of leadership coaching
	Journaling Tool	The client participants were instructed to make entries into their journal at the conclusion of each of the eight scheduled coaching sessions
	Client Post-Coaching Survey	This tool was provided to the clients at the conclusion of the client-coach relationship in order to collect client data
	Coach Post-Coaching Survey	This tool was provided to the coaches at the conclusion of the client-coach relationship in order to collect coach data

The data collection used a mixed-method approach to action research that included a synergistic blend of both quantitative and qualitative techniques including both online survey questionnaires and a client participant journaling process. Given the exploratory nature of this research project, journaling was chosen as a method to capture the qualitative data received from the leader clients. The intimacy of the journaling experience assisted the client in reflecting deeply on the experience and helped to capture those experiences accurately.

The client participants were asked to focus on a single, tangible goal to be achieved within an eight-week time period. During the eight-week-long coaching relationship, the coach worked with the client participant to identify the developmental or leadership goal and to make progress towards achieving that goal over the defined time period. These confidential coaching sessions took place over the telephone through established telecommunication resources. Throughout the

coaching relationship, the EMS leader client was required to actively document their experience, thoughts, and feelings about the coaching experience in the study journal provided to them by the research team. At the conclusion of the coaching relationship, both the client participants and the coach participants were asked to complete an online survey based upon the project's research question and sub-questions.

This major project was conducted in accordance with the Royal Roads University's (2007) *Research Ethics Policy*, which follows the eight guiding principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [Tri-Council], 1998).

Research Results and Conclusions

The five key findings of this research study were:

1. Client engagement is key to successful coaching relationships;
2. A trusting coaching relationship is a critical element of successful coaching outcomes;
3. Coaching promotes greater self-awareness;
4. Coaching stimulates leadership development; and
5. The process of leadership coaching is a guided journey.

Finding 1: Client Engagement is Key to Successful Coaching Relationships

Data from both the clients and the coaches supported the finding that the degree of client engagement was an important factor in determining the success of the coaching relationship. The more engaged and committed the client was to the coaching process and relationship, the more successful the process. Where the client was engaged and committed, progress was made quickly, especially in the area of self-discovery. One client stated, "It comes down to being self-aware, wanting to learn, change and develop. I have to want to participate in the coaching relationship for it to be a success" (C3)⁴.

Finding 2: A Trusting Coaching Relationship is a Critical Element in Successful Coaching Outcomes

It was evident throughout both the quantitative and qualitative data that trust and a trusting relationship were very important in order for the coaching relationship to succeed. In their journaling, several of the clients made a point to indicate the level of trust that they had in their

⁴ C3 Individual coaching clients are identified as C1, C2, and C3 etc.

coach at various points in the relationship. One journal entry indicated that “the relationship is very comfortable for me, I do not have a lot of reservation, I find it relaxing and somewhat refreshing after each session” (C4). It was also apparent that the professional coaches made obvious efforts to build the client’s trust in the process and in the coaching relationship itself. In one of the questions in the post-coaching relationship survey completed by the clients, all participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements using a rating scale matrix: (a) the coach made me feel comfortable; (b) I felt that I could trust the coach; and (c) overall, I was very satisfied with the coaching relationship.

One question in the national survey asked the respondents if they have ever used the services of a professional leadership or executive coach. Fourteen, or 22%, of the 65 of the respondents indicated that they had. When asked to rate how satisfied they were with the process used by the professional coach to build a *trusting* relationship, all respondents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied.

One of the findings uncovered in the research indicated that there might be a greater level of openness to an external coaching relationship - that is, a coaching relationship with a professional external coach or one who does not work in the same organization as the client. In the clients’ post-coaching relationship survey, one client commented, “A coaching relationship has to be independent and neutral. As EMS is a very small industry (even internationally), there will be limited success of having EMS leaders do the coaching to other EMS members” (C3). The same respondent, as well as another client, also indicated that mentoring relationships might be more achievable between two individuals in the same organization (C3 & S3).

The national survey attempted to address this issue by asking the respondents to indicate the degree to which they would be comfortable with the following coaching relationships: (a) a formal professional coaching relationship with someone external from your organization; (b) a formal coaching relationship with a co-worker (someone at the same level in the organization as yourself); and (c) a formal coaching relationship with your boss. Interestingly, the results from the survey showed that 24 of the 65 respondents, or 37%, indicated they would be very comfortable establishing a coaching relationship with their boss. However, 35 of the 65 respondents, or 54%, indicated that they would be very comfortable with a coaching relationship with someone external from their organization. The results for this question are presented in detail in Figure 1.

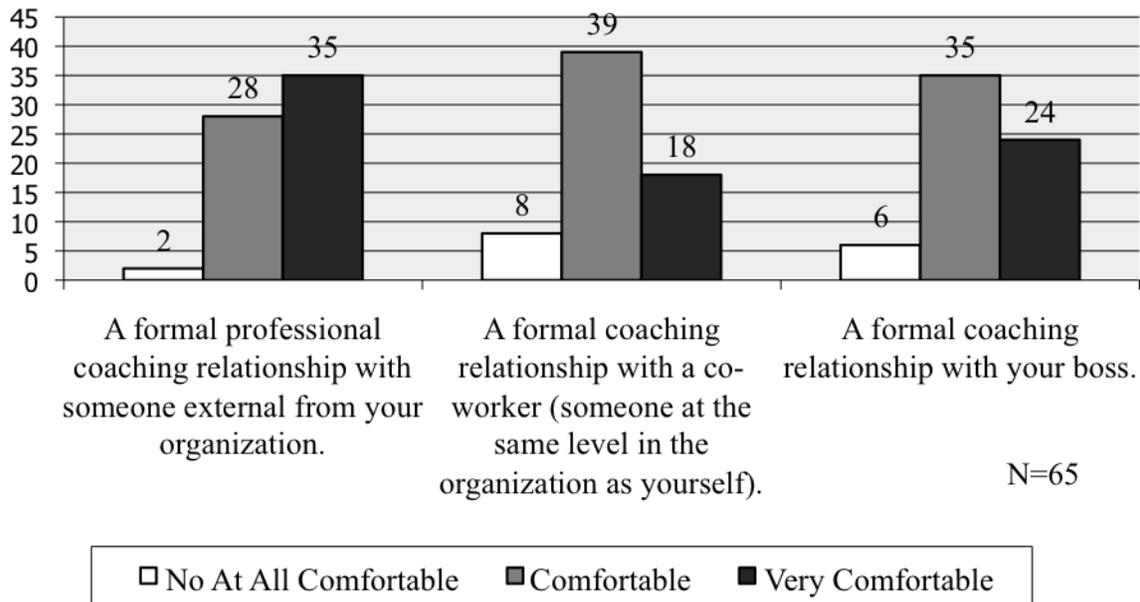


Figure 1. Level of Comfort in Various Coaching Relationships

Finding 3: Coaching Promotes Greater Self-Awareness

Overwhelmingly, the qualitative data suggested that leadership coaching promotes self-awareness and self-discovery. At numerous points in their journaling, all clients indicated they valued the coaching relationship in terms of creating an opportunity to self-reflect and self-evaluate. One client indicated that the notion of self-reflection was very important for leaders to do; however, he also indicated that taking the time to do this daily or several times during the day can prove to be very difficult given the pace that leaders are expected to maintain (C2).

Several of the clients indicated that their coach used profiling tools to help them uncover some of their natural tendencies as they related to personal leadership. One of them wrote, “The most beneficial thing to this point was doing the DiSC® evaluation and taking the time to reflect on the results. It has shown me things that I inherently know, but avoided dealing with in a proactive manner” (C3). This client wrote that he was able to apply some of what the assessment identified in order to make changes in how he conducted himself as a leader:

Conflict is a prime example of this behaviour and me avoiding it. In the last week, I have made a concerted effort to change these things. I have noted that having these difficult conversations has improved my confidence and I think improved the perceptions of me in the staff members’ eyes. (C3)

Finally, a client suggested in his writing that “self-reflection is the basis of the coaching relationship . . . , [and that he is now] taking the time to reflect upon situations before and after the event” (C3). Within the context of this body of research, this statement helps fortify the premise that coaching promotes greater self-awareness, which leads to focused leadership development and greater leadership capacity.

Finding 4: Coaching Stimulates Leadership Development

Leaders are continually challenged to find ways in which to create greater leadership capacity within both themselves and their leadership teams. One client suggested that the coaching relationship stimulated not only his personal leadership development, but also his emotional intelligence as well. He wrote,

Being a leader means that you will often be faced with unmet expectations and it’s how you manage the situation that will, to a certain extent, characterize your personal leadership style. It[’s] managing the emotion when the emotion hits. It’s having the ability to recognize it in the moment, controlling your reaction and not having to go back and make amends for it after the fact! (C2)

One client suggested that the feedback provided to him by the coach within a coaching relationship offered him value and that it supported his leadership development and self-confidence (C3). Both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that there is evidence supporting leadership and executive coaching as a developmental tool for EMS leaders. The evidence also indicates that much more work is necessary to raise the profile of coaching among EMS leaders.

Finding 5: The Process of Leadership Coaching is a Guided Journey

The art of leadership coaching brings together multiple disciplines in an effort to create greater personal and professional performance. This is typically accomplished through established coaching models or processes. The coaches involved in this research study were free to conduct their coaching sessions with their clients using their own individual style or model. Even though there was no consistent coaching process, all clients indicated that their coach did seem to follow a defined approach to the relationship and that the coach acted as more of a guide than a coach.

Study Conclusions

The following four major conclusions drawn from the research study’s findings were:

1. Successful coaching relationships are based upon trust, honesty, mutual success, and the desire to learn;

2. The self-awareness created within the coaching relationship creates greater leadership capacity;
3. Leadership coaching is a valuable way to develop EMS leaders though to date largely underutilized; and
4. EMS leaders can find value in coaching and in the development of a culture that supports a coaching style of leadership.

Conclusion 1: Successful Coaching Relationships Are Based Upon Trust, Honesty, Mutual Success, and the Desire to Learn

The trusting and honest coaching relationships established during the study translated into mutual success for both the client and the coach, including synergistically learning from one another during the coaching process. This co-created, interdependent bond was created between the client and coach participants and was necessary for the coaching relationship to be effective.

Throughout the collected data, there was significant evidence to suggest that the coach participants recognized the importance of the coaching relationship and that where the relationship developed quickly, progress was made more quickly. Where there was resistance on behalf of the client with respect to the coaching process or the development of the relationship, progress was slower. It was obvious to the research team that the coaches not only made significant efforts to establish the coaching relationship during their first meeting with their clients, but throughout the coaching sessions. This fact suggests that above all else, the quality of coaching relationship is not only critical to successful coaching outcomes but is the basis for the success of the coaching profession.

Conclusion 2: The Self-Awareness Created within the Coaching Relationship Creates Greater Leadership Capacity

Overwhelmingly, the study data indicated that enhanced client self-awareness was a key outcome of the coaching relationship. All of the clients identified several moments throughout the coaching sessions where the coach facilitated some level of self-awareness or self-discovery. Self-awareness was often preceded by self-reflection. One client described his reflection upon the manner in which he naturally deals with issues by writing,

What I find interesting as I write this is that by taking the time to identify the issue it has caused me to reflect upon it, think, and deal with it in a manner that is different from my normal means. Maybe this is a benefit, in the fact that I need to develop in the areas outside of my comfort zone. (C2)

Generally, after a moment of self-awareness, clients in the study recognized a deficiency or some leadership competency that required focus. One client wrote, “I am using the self-reflection to bring a different viewpoint to the table and to look at problems in a different manner. I am working to inject myself into uncomfortable circumstances rather than avoiding the situation” (C3).

While a likely outcome of all coaching relationships, this finding is especially significant for EMS Leaders and other leaders in health care. The immediacy, life-threatening and emergency nature of the operations under the direction of these leaders is particularly non-conducive to the personal reflection required to develop greater leadership capacity. It seems a coaching experience provides an environment that allows and requires EMS leaders to become self-reflective and self-aware, necessary precursors to leadership development

Conclusion 3: Leadership Coaching is a Valuable Way to Develop Leaders, Although Largely Underutilized by EMS Leaders

Only 21% of the national survey respondents indicated that they had previously used the services of a professional coach. Of those, 85% indicated that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the overall success achieved with respect to reaching their intended goal. This finding demonstrates that EMS leaders who have used the services of a professional coach did find value in the relationship. However, it also demonstrates that EMS leaders undervalue the use of executive coaches.

Conclusion 4: EMS Leaders Can Find Value in Coaching and in the Development of a Culture That Supports a Coaching Style of Leadership

Data returned from the national survey and from the client journaling process indicated that feedback, in the form of annual performance reviews and leadership mentoring, were popular forms of leadership development. The feedback offered to the clients by the coaches in this study was obviously valued and welcomed. What was evident was that the focused coaching relationship offered the type and frequency of feedback that the clients were seeking.

Leadership coaching offers a different approach: one that supports leaders in a safe and comfortable environment, while not providing all the answers. It focuses on providing clients with insight and perspective rather than solutions. It has been suggested that this coaching approach can and should be applied within a leadership style. The study participants supported a coaching style of leadership in the presence of clearly defined boundaries and a transparent relationship. One client suggested, “A leadership style that embraces personal development

through coaching can have a very profound impact” (S3). The participant coaches also suggested that EMS ought to adapt a style of leadership that embraces the art of coaching and make efforts to shift the culture of EMS to accept this approach:

It does take time and a commitment to bring any new approach into a culture. This needs to start at the top and be supported throughout all levels of leadership. The value that a coaching style brings to any organization is and can be transformational. (S4)

Coach participants also indicated that it is possible for leaders to become more coach-like and that a coaching style of leadership can be successful in organizations (S4). What is necessary, and has been supported by the study findings, is that there must be a trusting and respectful relationship in place between the leader and his subordinate. Several of the coaches suggested that in order for a coaching style of leadership to work, there must be clearly defined boundaries in the relationship to delineate coaching moments from moments of directing or managing. One coach commented, “This can only be achieved when the relationship is transparent and purposeful in its design” (S4).

Study Recommendations

In **June 2010**, the findings of this study were presented to the EMS Chiefs of Canada. The following four recommendations were proposed in response to the research question: *How can the EMS Chiefs of Canada and its membership exercise coaching as a tool to help advance the development of emergency medical services leadership in Canada?:*

That the EMS Chiefs of Canada:

1. Establish and support an executive coaching development grant;
2. Host regular coaching development workshops, presentations, and seminars;
3. Create a forum on the RMS Chiefs of Canada website that members can reference to seek out and engage the services of an executive coach, and,
4. Establish a coaching community of practice that brings together EMS leaders with credentialed EMS leader coaches.

Recommendation 1: Establish and Support an Executive Coaching Development Grant

The EMS Chiefs of Canada were advised to consider the formation and support of an ongoing executive coaching leadership development grant for its membership. This grant would provide

the means necessary for current and future EMS leaders to complete coach-training programs. This type of leadership development not only supports individual leadership success, but also supports the success of colleagues, teams, and organizations that may benefit from potential coaching relationships. The implementation of a coaching leadership development grant by the EMS Chiefs of Canada would help to support the notion of coaching within the EMS profession, and at the same time, build the leadership capacity necessary for current and future EMS leaders.

Investment for EMS leadership development must also be supported by the EMS service providers and agencies, and, more importantly, by organizations that represent EMS leaders, such as the EMS Chiefs of Canada. Investment in leadership development has already been identified as an important factor in building leadership capacity (EMSCC, 2006).

By providing the support and funding for an executive coaching development grant, the EMS Chiefs of Canada would demonstrate its commitment and dedication to its membership and to the EMS community. This initiative would also serve as an example for other health care professions to follow with respect to leadership development and, showcase the EMS Chiefs of Canada as a progressive, innovative, and leading organization.

Recommendation 2: Host Regular Coaching Development Workshops, Presentations and Seminars

The EMS Chiefs of Canada should create opportunities for its membership to participate in and gain greater appreciation and awareness of the benefits of coaching. It is recommended that the EMS Chiefs of Canada Leadership Development Subcommittee establish coaching education opportunities within current leadership development forums. This should include: (a) coaching presentations and seminars at the annual EMS Chiefs of Canada leadership conference, (b) the addition of coaching education presentations throughout the year as part of the web-based presentations offered by the EMS Chiefs of Canada membership services committee, and (c) the establishment of national coaching learning forums facilitated by guest speakers.

EMS Leaders need the skill set to become more coach-like in order to meet the changing needs of the workplace and the challenges inherent in the system. They also require a forum and opportunities in which to build this skill set.

Recommendation 3: Create a Forum on the EMS Chiefs of Canada Website that Members can Reference to Seek Out and Engage the Services of an Executive Coach

It was recommended that the EMS Chiefs of Canada provide on its website a portal for its membership to engage the services of professional executive coaches. The EMS Chiefs of Canada has more than 170 members who represent the EMS leaders in all ten provinces and three territories in Canada. Providing a mechanism for members to engage the services of a coaching professional would directly support the priority and future services indentified by EMS Chiefs of Canada through the Membership Services Committee (EMSCC, 2004b). This type of initiative would also create an added benefit to EMS Chiefs of Canada membership. Creating value in membership supports the long-term efficacy and future of the EMS Chiefs of Canada.

The International Coach Federation's web-based coach referral service was cited as one example of an organization that can create linkages between coaches and EMS leaders. A list of participating coaches and coaching organizations would be maintained by the membership services committee and could be based upon the recommendations of EMS Chiefs of Canada members who have enjoyed successful coaching relationships with the agencies listed. This approach will provide the membership of the EMS Chiefs of Canada easy access to the services of a professional credentialed coach and create an avenue for coaching organizations to promote the services they can offer specifically to leaders in EMS.

Recommendation 4: Establish a Coaching Community of Practice that Brings Together EMS Leaders with Credentialed EMS Leader Coaches

It was suggested that the EMS Chiefs of Canada create an EMS coaching community of practice where members can go to receive leadership coaching from EMS peer coaches at no cost. This forum would create a meeting place for coaching-credentialed EMS leaders to meet with other EMS leaders in order to create mutually beneficial coaching relationships. The coaches in these relationships would see value in this community of practice, in that they would be given a forum in which to practice the art of coaching with a professional colleague, thereby supporting the advancement and development of not only that colleague, but also of the profession of EMS itself. Clients participating in this community of practice would benefit by entering into a coaching relationship with an individual who is not only a credentialed coach, but also an EMS leader. The coach in this type of relationship brings both the competencies of a professional coach and experience as an EMS leader, both of which offer a compelling argument to implement such an initiative.

Participants in the study suggested that, while the coaching relationship was beneficial, its success was likely due to the fact that the relationship involved professional or credentialed coaches who were external to clients' organization and held no power or hierarchal relationship with the client. The research did indicate, however, that there would be added value in the coach understanding the culture of EMS and the challenges that face its leaders.

The value of professional coaching or credentialed coaching services cannot be overstated. With the lack of or varied understanding of the coaching profession among EMS leaders, it would be very important that the coaches involved in this community of practice have the credentials in order to ensure successful coaching outcomes and powerful coaching experiences. One of the study participants indicated that relationships with professional and credentialed coaches would be of greater value to EMS leaders: "What I experienced through my coaching relationship required a considerable amount of training and knowledge from the coach. I have reservations that the leaders in EMS would have enough training and knowledge to facilitate an adequate coaching experience" (C3). This client also indicated that the skill of coaching is something that is rarely seen in EMS and that in order for it to be successful, formal professional relationships are likely to be the best approach.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions

The recommendations of this study were unanimously endorsed by the EMS Chiefs of Canada in June 2010. Implementation of these will help to create an environment where the EMS Chiefs of Canada can successfully achieve its mission. Although Canada is a large country with a diverse and loosely connected EMS community, the study findings indicate that there is a desire to use coaching and a coaching style of leadership in order to create greater leadership capacity.

The EMSCC is well-positioned to act on these recommendations with a track record of developing and implementing groundbreaking strategic plans for EMS and consistently supporting the membership of the organization in achieving leadership and organizational success. The current members of the EMS Chiefs of Canada represent EMS systems from coast to coast. The 20 board members represent some of the largest, most sophisticated EMS systems in Canada. These talented leaders face daily challenges that test their leadership and the strength of their organizations. The EMS Chiefs of Canada serves to support these leaders using its national

network of EMS leader colleagues; the development of coaching competence among EMS leaders will serve as a means to achieve such support.

On the surface, it appears simple and easy for the EMS Chiefs of Canada to play a key role in educating EMS leaders to the concepts of both executive coaching and peer coaching. However a number of challenges exist.

First, the establishment of a coaching community of practice would present some specific challenges. It is recognized that there is currently a shortage of competent executive and leadership coaches (Yukl, 2006). Therefore, it is likely that it may be difficult in the early days to recruit EMS leaders with coaching credentials to participate in a community of practice. However it is hoped that wide-spread communication of this research and a greater focus on coaching development among EMS will inspire more EMS leaders to seek credentialing in leadership and executive coaching. Therefore, it may be necessary for the EMS Chiefs of Canada to seek out coaching professionals without an EMS background to participate in this initiative initially. However, it would be necessary that these coaches would at least be familiar with the EMS culture and some of the challenges that EMS professionals face in their organizations.

Secondly, for peer coaching to be effective, there are five characteristic elements to be considered: (a) equal status of partners, (b) focus on personal and professional development of both peers, (c) integration of reflection on practice to identify critical incidents for focus, (d) emphasis on process as well as content that facilitates leadership skill development, and (e) acceleration of career learning (Parker et al., 2008, pp. 490–491). Therefore, the establishment of a coaching community of practice would require some structure and support in order for all parties to benefit from the relationships. The EMS Chiefs of Canada would be required to play an active role in creating and maintaining this structure by implementing community norms, defining participation criteria or prerequisites, creating community of practice guidelines, and hosting a community meeting place.

Finally, given the influence of the EMS Chiefs of Canada both nationally and within member organizations, it is expected there will be significant support for and movement towards a cultural shift that supports a coaching style of leadership. What remains unclear and ultimately a significant risk for the cultural acceptance of coaching within EMS is the funding support that

will be necessary in order to create coaching learning opportunities for EMS leaders, both formally and informally. Given the fiscal pressures that currently face the health care system and EMS leaders, support for leadership development in the area of coaching may prove to be a challenge.

Summary

This research project presents a view of how the EMS Chiefs of Canada can better utilize leadership coaching to advance EMS leadership development to meet the significant and growing leadership challenges facing EMS service provider organizations, and indeed, all leaders in the health care continuum.

The recommendations presented in this report serve as a springboard to build EMS leadership capacity through coaching by supporting the following leadership principles:

1. Self-reflection supports greater leadership self-awareness;
2. A high degree of self-awareness supports leadership development; and
3. Leadership development is a journey that creates personal and organizational growth.

Leadership coaching provides an environment where all three of these principles can be put into action. Enhanced leadership capacity, improved patient care and creative solutions to the many challenges facing the health care system in Canada and beyond, will be the logical outcome.

About the Authors

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Trevor Maslyk is one of seven Executive Directors responsible for EMS Operations within Alberta Health Services, the largest healthcare organization in Canada. In his EMS career of nearly 20 years, Trevor has practiced as a paramedic within both air and ground ambulance operations and has also contributed significantly as a leader in EMS throughout the province. Trevor has a passion for leadership and for life-long-learning. That said, he has recently completed his Masters of Arts in Leadership from Royal Roads University. The research project described in this article received full academic approval in June of 2010 and was conceived, planned and executed by Trevor in accordance with the academic standard outlined by Royal Roads University.

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Connie MacKinnon is a Professional Certified Coach (PCC), former senior organizational leader and experienced organizational consultant. She is founder and president of Shoreline Consulting Group Inc, located in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. For the past twelve years, Connie has provided consulting & coaching services to clients in the private and public sectors in meeting their strategic and leadership challenges. She is a graduate of The Institute for Generative Leadership's *Coaching Excellence in Organizations (2008 & 2010)*, and the International Coach Federation (ICF) accredited program *Newfield Coaching and Organizational Learning (2003)*. Connie is a Program Coach with the ICF-accredited coach training programs provided by The Newfield Network. Most recently, Connie worked with over 200 EMS Leaders in Alberta to plan and execute change leadership strategies associated with the transition of EMS funding and governance from municipalities to the Province of Alberta. She acted as Project Content Advisor and coach to the research project described in this article. www.shorelineconsultinggroup.com

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