

## **Revisiting the issue of boundaries between coaching and counselling**

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The state of coaching as a field of knowledge and practice has recently changed significantly. Since the first edition of this Handbook some debates and agendas for research became less important but others became more prominent. The issue of differentiation between therapy/counselling and coaching received significant attention in the last decade (Simons, 2006; Bachkirova, 2007; Griffiths and Campbell, 2008; Spinelli, 2008; Maxwell, 2009; Price, 2009; Baker, 2013) but there are signs of the very recent declining of interest for this topic. One might assume from this situation that this issue has been resolved once and for all. However, the conclusions of the above publications indicate that for various parties interested in the development of the coaching field many questions remain unanswered. This suggests that the topic of differentiating coaching from counselling/therapy would benefit from revisiting and possibly - reformulating.

At an early stage of the literature on this issue some voices were already explicit about the complexity of establishing clear boundaries between coaching and counselling (Bachkirova and Cox, 2004; Simons, 2006; Bachkirova, 2007). Recent research in the last decade has added more substance to this position through exploring the views of practitioners. Although there is some evidence that potential clients, sponsors of coaching and practitioners deal with this issue in a pragmatic way (Maxwell, 2008; Baker, 2015; Sweney, 2014), many coaches and particularly newcomers to the field of coaching, counselling and coaching psychology are still left in confusion. (We will use the term 'coachee' when referring to individual coaching clients and the term 'client' when relevant to both practices: coaching and counselling). In this chapter we will explore a changed state of knowledge about the issue of boundaries between the coaching and counselling/therapy highlighting the nature of this confusion and typical ways of dealing with it in practice. Potential reasons for this confusion will be then discussed together with implications for the current situation in research and practice.

### **Current understanding of boundaries between coaching and counselling**

The themes of the current literature on the topic could be divided into two groups. Some papers mainly focus on the understanding of how things really are in relation to these boundaries in practice (e.g. Maxwell, 2008). They highlight resulting issues of the current state of affairs and pragmatic solution that practitioners seem to adapt. Others papers tend to address the issues of boundaries with an intention to find a conceptual solution in addition to pragmatic one (e.g. Bachkirova, 2007). There are of course some papers that aim for both: describing the reality and making conceptual propositions (e.g. Price, 2008). We will start with a brief descriptions of these group of themes and then proceed with discussion of more specific issues that are debated in both groups.

The first group of themes acknowledges the following situation. Professional guidance has traditionally suggested that if a practitioner identifies that their client would benefit from

additional support from a coach or counsellor, the client should be advised and referred to the appropriate professional (Summerfield, 2002). Whilst coaches appear to believe that there are definite differences between coaching and counselling, often they have difficulty stating where the boundaries specifically lie in practice. Rather than identifying clear differentiation between coaching and counselling, recent literature and research widely acknowledges that the boundaries between coaching and counselling often become blurry or fuzzy (Jopling, 2007; Maxwell, 2009; Jinks, 2010). When boundaries are felt to be blurry some coaches refer to having a gut feeling or intuitively knowing when an issue was something that they should not deal with in coaching (Hart, Blattner and Leipsic, 2001). Alternatively, boundaries tend to be defined by negotiations between coach and coachee regarding what would be appropriate to discuss rather than theoretically defined parameters (Maxwell, 2009). It may therefore appear that many practitioners act as if suggested boundaries do not exist in practice, but believe that others within their professional or social group accept the boundaries as providing parameters to the discipline. As a consequence, the practitioners may try to self-identify boundaries according to their capabilities and beliefs and thus appear to support this concept (Baker, 2015).

The themes that focus on conceptualizing the issues of boundaries highlight the intention for the future. Whilst some in the coaching and counselling community remain resolute in the need to enforce boundaries and delineate practice (e.g. Grant, 2007), others claim that, in a relationship based on trust and understanding definition of boundaries may remain to be contextual and based on the coaches knowledge and ability to help the coachee with presented issues (e.g. Cavanagh, 2009). According to the latter, practitioners should therefore be allowed to utilise all their skills to the coachee's advantage. Indeed, it has been argued that rather than seeing things as either/or it may be more circumspect to view them as interconnected in a complex way, where one informs the other (Mumby, 2011). As a result coaching and counselling practitioners may wish to work with both approaches to help their clients (Popovic and Boniwell, 2007; Popovic and Jinks, 2013) or implement flexible contracting to meet their client's needs (Baker, 2013).

#### *What complicates the issue of boundaries?*

The debates on the boundaries between coaching and counselling become more sober when the issue of mental health becomes involved. For example, Campbell and Griffiths (2008) argued that mental health is situated on a continuum and results from their study indicate that clients were not situated in either coaching or counselling, but fluctuated on the continuum between the two approaches. Indeed, some therapist/coaches believed that coaching clients could be as emotionally vulnerable as therapy clients but concealed it (Maxwell, 2009). Coaches additionally discussed how working in an organisational environment the whole person is present in the coaching sessions. Therefore they do not solely focus on work-related issues as some of the reasons for seeking coaching may lie in personal problems outside of the work context. As a consequence, the issue that the coach was contracted to address was often an effect of an underlying personal issue (Maxwell, 2009).

Although not all coaches are willing to work with psychological problems in coaching practice and do not wish to be 'muddying the waters' it is difficult to deny that the coachee's personal issues and psychological problems commonly arise in coaching sessions (Maxwell, 2009). Coaches may feel uncomfortable when working with, for example, distressed coachees, as

they might not have the appropriate skills and capabilities to support them adequately. Concerns relating to coaches' abilities to recognise mental health problems and manage them effectively have been expressed in various studies (Hart, Blattner and Leipsic, 2001; Grant and Zackon, 2004; Turner, 2010; Jinks, 2010).

Despite confusion and inconsistency in boundary recognition, experienced practitioners claim to have confidence in their abilities to identify when issues were better suited to counselling than coaching. Additionally, the majority claimed to have appropriate capabilities to help their clients with issues that may arise in practice. However recent research has illustrated anomalies in experienced practitioners' perceptions of abilities (Baker, 2015). Although coaches indicated extensively positive self-assessment of their abilities to assist coachees, their reported education and qualifications made it hard to reconcile what knowledge and abilities practitioners were drawing on to manage the presented problems. Whilst it should be acknowledged that coaches may acquire tacit knowledge from previous occupations and professional backgrounds, they may subsequently demonstrate overconfidence in their self-assessment of their capabilities. As a consequence, it could be argued that self-assessment of their ability to effectively support their coachees with all difficulties may be over estimated. Similar concerns were expressed in the research by Price (2009).

Jopling (2007) suggests that a good understanding of psychology and counselling theory is needed to be able to identify blocks which may impede development. Practitioners believed that coaches needed to be aware of working in the coachee's best interest and working within their competences to maintain professionalism. Some felt that regulation was needed to instil confidence in potential clients and provide clarity of the services offered (Hart, Blattner and Leipsic, 2001; Maxwell, 2009; Price, 2009; Jinks, 2010).

To summarise, the majority of the literature and research indicates the boundaries are not clear and practitioners deal with them in a pragmatic way. However, many interested parties insist on importance of the boundaries and the need for clear guidelines and more extensive training for coaches.

### *Evidence of explicit amalgamation of coaching and counselling*

At the same time there is a relatively new tendency different from the above: the literature that explicitly advocates working with clients without a boundary. However, the ideas in this literature are relevant only for coaches with therapeutic background and experiences. Only they can benefit from the amalgamation of two practices.

Working in the fuzzy space, coaches who have counselling or therapeutic training may work with the whole person to help them understand the meaning and purpose in their lives (Jopling, 2007). Some coaches and counsellors indicated that they worked with both coaching and counselling approaches (Jinks, 2010). Rather than refer at times of need, coaches had adopted alternative way of working to support their clients. For example, Choi and Pak (2006) suggest that working across boundaries may be seen as a continuum. Practitioners may adopt a multidisciplinary approach (Spence, 2012) and choose to re-contract between coaching and counselling practice, to support their clients. Interestingly, this approach ensures approaches are kept discrete and boundaries remained intact if appropriately identified. Indeed, studies have shown that when working as a coach, 41% of

coaches surveyed felt that they would be willing to offer to re-contract and provide counselling services (Baker, 2015).

Further across the continuum, coaches may integrate approaches and self-identify themselves as therapist-coaches and coach-therapists. These identities are adopted by practitioners who choose to work across boundaries with the same client (Jinks, 2010; Baker, 2015). This eliminates the need for identifying the boundaries. By merging disciplines, practitioners are able to establish a balance between the need to be affiliated with coaching and therapy, the impetus to reinforce a distinctive individual identity (Brewer, 1991).

It may be presumed that the number of experienced practitioners who favoured integrating coaching and counselling approaches in practice would be relatively low. However research by Baker (2015) has shown that whilst over half (53%) of the respondents were of the view that coaching and counselling should be kept separate, nearly a third indicated that the helping approaches should be integrated rather than seeking to implement boundaries. These results strongly suggest that a significant proportion of practitioners viewed boundaries as malleable and were willing to work across disciplines in practice. Many participants in the same study demonstrated various creative ways that helped them to integrate elements of coaching and counselling in the same approach.

This literature provides ideas for conceptualisation of practice for those who are in the position to combine elements of coaching and counselling in their practice. It may also indicate a potential direction for development of the coaching field. However, very little is discussed about the issues that this approach creates, e.g. for clients, organisational sponsors and novice practitioners, particularly in countries where regulations require clarity and differentiation of practices.

#### *Unresolved issues for coaches, particularly for novices*

Whilst conceptual issues remain a subject of debates, there are immediate issues that require solutions for practitioners, particularly for new comers to the field who are only trained as coaches. The confusion they experience in relation to the boundaries between coaching and counselling is unsurprising, because there seem to be two further tendencies in the coaching literature and professional discourses pulling coaches in different directions.

The conceptual literature tends to emphasise the need for in-depth work in coaching. For example, it has been argued that working with psychological blocks and emotions is essential for long-term change (Bachkirova and Cox, 2004). Spinelli (2005) emphasises 'being' as opposed to 'doing' in the coaching relationship. To help the client gained greater self-awareness it has been suggested (Bluckert, 2006) that coaching adopts a slower pace. Bluckert also introduced a concept of psychological mindedness to reflect an individual's ability to reflect on themselves, others and their relationships with others, thus enhancing the ability of coaches to work with the deeper psychological content of clients' situations and selves.

At the same time, it is emphasised in guidelines, ethical regulations and training manuals that coaches need to exercise caution and be aware of their limitations. This concern is particularly highlighted by coaches who have counselling and psychotherapy experience, warning about potential for harm that can be brought about by unskilled interventions, which seek to explore deeper emotions (Baker, 2015). The issues becomes even more acute when

there is a need to identify and make decisions in cases that involve mental health issues which needs more guidance for all coaches (Cavanagh and Buckley, 2014). Experienced practitioners argue that potential harm can be caused by a lack of awareness or insufficient attention paid to the coachee's heightened emotional state. This warning is relevant for all, but particularly for new or novice coaches who may find the process of exploration challenging.

These two tendencies may create an internal conflict for new coaches. Although they might feel inspired to provide service of deep psychological value, the challenge is also to make this work safe. Identifying discrete areas of practice in a multi-faceted industry has significant implications for new coaches with limited practical experience. Without the advantage of professional skills or contextual knowledge, it is important that novice and newly trained coaches are aware of working within their competencies and the potential to cause harm to their clients.

Although new coaches bring prior experience to their practice, their tacit knowledge may not reflect the competence of the new professional community. Therefore learning within their new role may follow a process of readjustment and repositioning (Wenger, 2010). New coaches learn by forming concepts from the information they are presented with and have no choice but use their perceptions to make sense of real life situations when their training is complete (Daley, 1999). Studies have shown that novices may lack confidence in applying recently learnt knowledge in autonomous practice and they often seek reassurance or confirmation that action taken is appropriate in context (Daley, 1999). Additionally, they may struggle with perceived expectations from coachees and therefore rush to provide a solution based on a learnt framework or technique (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000).

The perceived pressures and expectations may lead to complications when working at the boundaries in coaching. Whilst new coaches believe that there are differences and boundaries between the two helping approaches, in practice they find the boundaries are fine lines which can easily be crossed (Baker, 2015). With the vagueness and inconsistency of boundaries described in theoretical literature (Bachkirova, 2007) new coaches may attempt to use intuition to identify when practice has transitioned from coaching to counselling. However, as intuition is developed from experience of regular or routine actions (Myers, 2002), it is unlikely that novice and newly trained coaches would make consistently effective decisions in practice.

With such variable criteria it is difficult to have confidence in novice and newly trained coaches' ability to consistently identify when coachees' needs would be more appropriately addressed in counselling. Being able to see and recognise problems in a wider context may be fundamental to developing new coaches' confidence and competence. Therefore it could be argued that acquiring competence within the field entails gaining the ability to perceive the patterns of behaviour or information that the client presents (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000). Therefore in the initial stages of autonomous practice, it may be important for new coaches to be self aware and mindful of the limits of their knowledge and competence.

To summarise, it appears that the guidance that currently exist in training and development programmes about the boundaries between coaching and counselling is insufficient. New coaches are left in the position to develop their confidence by experimenting and learning from their mistakes. This can help them to arrive at the stage of experienced coaches who

might compensate their lack of understanding by relying on their ability to deal with unknown situations.

### *Knowingly exceeding competence and capabilities*

Confidence and beliefs in ones ability could be at the same time a double-edged sword. Whilst new coaches suggest they are aware of boundaries between helping approaches, confusion and inconsistencies were apparent in recent studies which indicated that new coaches would be willing to exceed their competencies to help coachees with psychological problems (Baker, 2015). These findings could be interpreted as possible unconscious incompetence and new coaches not 'knowing what they do not know', due to an inability to identify the limits of their capabilities.

However, the same tendency is evident with experienced coaches. If the findings of research by Baker (2015) are compared to findings from previous research investigating organisational coaches experience of managing boundaries (Price, 2009), the results show marked similarities. It seems that both new and experienced coaches are willing to work beyond their capabilities. There are obvious concerns with this situation. Working with people who experience mental health difficulties may be appropriate for coaches who have a background in counselling. Coaching can also be provided in parallel with support from the mental health specialist. However, new coaches and coaches without such support or background may find it difficult to identify the limits of their abilities. As a consequence, they may find themselves in difficult situations, lacking the confidence or understanding of how to manage emotional reactions and their own personal boundaries with negative consequences not only for a coachee but also for their own reputation. Just to suggest that coaches should not be 'squeamish' about working with emotional or psychological problems (Rogers, 2011) seems to be short-sighted in this light.

At the same time, there are various ways to interpret the findings about willingness of coaches to work beyond their capabilities. It is possible that coaches overestimate their abilities and consciously take risks mixing coaching and counselling interventions in spite of the various concerns associated with this risk. Another explanation is that coaching and counselling are so similar that various attempts to draw clear boundaries consistently fail leaving coaches to respond to emerging situations in a pragmatic way. As experience is accumulated by engaging with new situations and stretching their capability, it is possible that coaches' willingness to work beyond these capabilities is a sign of their awareness of the conditions they face and their pragmatic responses to them.

### **Exploring the reasons for current situation**

There are many incentives to resolve the issue of boundaries between coaching and counselling. The most obvious comes from coaches who are adamant that it is necessary to define discrete areas of practice and seek to reinforce barriers rather than bridge practices (Wenger, 2010). They wish to be able to establish clear contracts, which specify the content and process of coaching sessions and enable coaches to set expectations and identify clear limits. It also seems reasonable to argue that clearly delineating between coaching and

counselling would help coaching achieve a professional status. At the current time, coaching does not meet the criteria to be accepted as a profession. A profession is typically defined by specific criteria which include: distinct skills; a minimum period of training to demonstrate proficiency; a sound knowledge base; a code of ethics; formal organisation; accreditation and regulation; and being recognised by society as a distinct profession (Bennett, 2006; Lane, Stelter and Stout Rostron, 2014).

In spite of the above incentives there are also factors that work against them. Whilst some may feel coaching needs to attain traditional standards to be viewed as a profession, others believed complying with restrictive criteria could be seen as a means to exert power and regulation (Lane, Stelter and Stout-Rostron, 2014). Furthermore, some authors believe that demonstrating that coaching was a discrete area of practice would be problematic and restrictive (Cavanagh, 2009). Not only did coaching share many commonalities with counselling, but various other professions also implemented coaching strategies as part of the service they deliver. We would like to add to this that defining specific coaching identity that does not encroach on other areas of practice is difficult in principle because the identity of coaching is an unresolved issue.

It would be useful to explore why the field is now in a situation when there is no agreement about what coaching is. In exploring this we need to start from the consideration of what a good definition of practice would entail. In 2009 Bachkirova and Kauffman (2009) discussed how coaching can meet two main criteria important for a definition of practice: 'universality' and 'uniqueness'. "Universality means that a good definition of coaching should indicate elements (features) of it that are present in all different types, genres and approaches of coaching. Such definition should be applicable to all types of coaching. Uniqueness means that good enough definition of coaching should include elements that would clearly differentiate coaching from other professional activities such as e.g. training, consulting, counselling" (p. 98). In the simplest way a good definition should resonate with all professional coaches *and* make coaching distinctive from practices that are not seen as coaching. They applied criteria of universality and uniqueness to various attempts to define coaching as a professional practice analysing four types of definition that are based on the following aspects: what coaching is for (purpose); what it involves (process); where it is conducted (context) and the population it serves (clients). They concluded that in relation to each of the above aspects the differences between various coaching practices were too wide to find sufficient similarities between them thus questioning their universality. In the same way the attempts to define coaching did not show sufficient differences from other, non-coaching practices, which could not be contested, thus questioning the uniqueness of coaching (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2009).

Apart from the issues with definitions of practice there seem to be other tendencies in the coaching field that indicate a changing attitude to the need for certainty and precision in conceptualising coaching. For example, it has been argued that the more developmentally focused the coaching is the closer it becomes to counselling in terms of the context of interventions, transcending the contextual boundaries (Bachkirova, 2007). Although at the earlier stages of coaching field more emphasis was on the performance coaching, a recently growing acceptance of developmental coaching became more noticeable. It is possible then that with further development of coaching practice some practitioners become more interested in holistic approaches to coaching. They wish to influence coachees' life in a more profound way, thus expanding the boundaries of how coaching was originally conceived.

Some voices in coaching communities argued for the need to appreciate flexibility of coaching rather than aiming for 'clear-cut' boundaries (e.g. Cavanagh, 2009). This has been fuelled by wider recognition of complexity involved in coaching assignments and difficulties of simple conceptualisations of coaching process that could be explained by the multidisciplinary nature of coaching. Complexity theories became well recognised and coaching engagements are often seen as complex adaptive systems (CAS) (Stacey, 2003; 2012; Cavanagh and Lane, 2012; Bachkirova and Lawton Smith, 2015). Relative closeness to other disciplines of knowledge also helps to see similar issues that other fields have gone or are going through and learn from them. Consequently, similarity of coaching with other practices does not represent such a threat to its identity and can be even seen as an advantage.

Furthermore, much wider influences on the coaching field from the modernist and postmodernist worldviews create an effect on how we see our practice and change some attitudes. It is clear that modernist tendencies of seeking certainty and firm foundation of policies were fairly explicit in the early days of coaching industry and reflected in the positivist preferences in coaching research, investment in accreditation systems and ideas of strict regulation and professionalization of coaching. Although these tendencies remain strong, it is noticeable that postmodern and pragmatist discourses begin to advocate appreciation of diversity in coaching styles, recognition of complexity and contextual influences in coaching assignments together with critique of the commitment to fixed rules and regulations (Garvey, 2011; Western, 2012; Bachkirova, 2011, 2016).

In relation to the issues of a settled definition of practice that would be needed for differentiation between coaching and counselling, the theories of postmodernism and poststructuralism bring a serious challenge. According to these theories 'the truth as consistency is less important than the truth as variation', because "the fixity is always a necessary convention or illusion, rather than a deeper truth" (Williams, 2005). It might mean that our failings to define coaching once and for all are fairly justified and may be seen a sign of apprehension towards fixed and bounding ideas that might prevent this field from freely developing in response to the changing needs for this practice and in harmony with constantly moving social conditions. If this lack of clarity in identifying coaching is not an issue than variation of coaching even on the margins with therapy can be approached with interest rather than with apprehension.

This postmodern attitude at the same time does not preclude from making sense of coaching process and demonstrating in practice and in complex situations how important decisions can be made and differences of approaches negotiated. "To deny absolutes, such as a certain core, is not to deny significant differences that we can act upon" (Williams, 2005). In fact one of the useful lenses that could be offered on coaching/counselling boundary could be the status of the practitioner as an expert. Coaching relationships are generally seen as more egalitarian, more balanced in terms of power than it is usually assumed in other helping practices such as consulting, mentoring, social work and therapy. In as much as therapists try to establish an equal partnership with clients (and some branches of therapy include this as important principle e.g. existential) therapists are seen as experts in the process of therapy and often – in the content of clients concerns. In coaching, however, the ownership of both the process and content of the sessions is advocated to belong to coachees with shared responsibility for what is happening.



It is interesting that there is an emerging evidence that this feature may even unite coaches of various traditions thus satisfying the criteria of universality, something that was disputed before (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2009). In a recent research by Bachkirova, Sibley and Myers (2015) 41 coaches from different orientations applied a developed instrument for describing an imagined typical coaching session. The findings demonstrated a shared perspective in the way coaching sessions are described. One element of their descriptions was that the role of the coach could be best conceptualized as a 'collaborative explorer' rather than 'informed expert'. This element had a surprisingly stronger consensus amongst the participating coaches than the diversity of coaching traditions, from which they came, might have suggested (Bachkirova et al, 2015).

To summarise, first of all we argue that at the current of stage of development the coaching field may benefit from a more inclusive and relaxed attitude to defining coaching but without minimising the rigour of practice and research. This attitude is more in line with postmodern and pragmatist worldviews on applied disciplines but without the appearance of 'anything goes' element that sometimes is attributed to postmodernism. At the same time we offer one particular differentiating factor of coaching from counselling, and potentially with other practices, indicating a stronger collaborative role of the practitioner. This element is also in line with the above underpinning philosophy and worldview.

### **Implications of the suggested conceptualisation of differences**

There are various groups of stakeholders of coaching who would benefit from considering these propositions: practitioners, clients, educators of coaching and coaching supervisors. Before we address the implications for these groups it has to be acknowledged that some coaching psychologists may find the above aspect of differentiation not working in their favour. The status of 'informed expert' has many advantages and coaching psychologists work hard to achieve this by the nature of their extensive education and additional training. There are also various activities in their portfolio that require a status of an expert and knowledge that supports it. It could mean that a different identity might be sought to satisfy this group of practitioners. Alternatively, they might wish to embrace this feature and to stay sufficiently flexible and creative in their coaching work.

#### *Implications for practitioners*

There are two important implications for practitioners that we wish to address following the above discussion. One is concerned with the most difficult issues for coaches – identifying mental health issues, that is often conflated with the topic of boundaries between coaching and therapy. The second implication is concerned with contracting in coaching.

In relation to the first implication it is important to recognise that identification of mental health issues is not particularly connected with boundaries between coaching and therapy. The task of diagnosis of mental health is not much easier for therapists, counsellors and psychologists than for coaches. The majority of these psychologically trained practitioners would not claim any certainty in such skills. At the same time this topic is important. Studies in Australia have shown that 45% of the population may experience mental health difficulties during their lifetime. Further, 1 in 4 in the UK are likely to experience a mental health problem (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008; Layard, Clark, Bell et al., 2006). Many who suffer from mental

health difficulties do not seek support from their medical practitioners or mental health professionals. As a result, undiagnosed mental health problems are prevalent throughout communities and workplaces (Layard, Clark, Bell et al., 2006). It can therefore be appreciated that many people may continue to work when experiencing mental health issues (Johns, 2010). Working instead of taking sick leave has been termed 'presenteeism'. When considering the client base of organisational or executive coaching, it is particularly salient that presenteeism is more likely to be demonstrated in executive and managerial grades (SCMH, 2007).

Although coaches have a duty of care to their coachees, their main task is not necessarily to diagnose a mental health issue that the coachee might have, but to mainly judge if they themselves have capabilities of working with the level of complexity this issue might present. Cavanagh and Buckley (2014) highlight that many factors influence perceptions of the boundaries between coaching and other 'helping by talking' approaches. Coaching may be seen as a more socially acceptable form of support or helping when experiencing psychological difficulties. Due to the diversity of skills and experience that inform coaching, the proficiencies and abilities of each individual coach vary greatly. In a coaching situation, it may not be appropriate for the coach to offer a diagnosis of any mental health problem. Rather, coaches need to be mindful of contractual, ethical and legal implications of exceeding their capabilities.

A second implication is concerned with the nature of contracting in coaching that is a more regular topic for the coaching engagements and is closely aligned with the importance of the element of coaching that separates it from therapy. The notion of coaching relationship being more egalitarian, more balanced than in therapy is not new. In coaching coachees normally see their coach as an equal, whereas counselling clients may see the counsellor as an expert (Hart, Blattner and Leipsic, 2001). What we can emphasise here is the nature of extensive contracting in coaching that might need to be explicitly articulated in order to establish this egalitarian relationship as more important than other practicalities.

For example in research by Jopling (2007) coaching contracts provided a framework for practice. In comparison to counselling contracts, coaches explicitly defined their methods of working and their expectations of the coachee's role within the coaching process. Coaching contracts were seen to be formal, constrained by specific time frames and focused on coachee expectations. In comparison, counselling contracts were considered to be flexible and focused more on logistics such as meeting times, payment terms and cancellation arrangements (Griffiths and Campbell, 2008, Baker, 2015). Indeed, contracting has been highlighted by several studies as being important in coaching as a means of clarifying methods of working, and ensuring that coaching accommodated the coachee expectations (Jopling, 2007; Griffiths and Campbell, 2008; Maxwell, 2009). At the same time, although many feel that contracting is important, some practitioners suggest that the initial agreement could not accommodate the issues that arose in the coaching sessions. Therefore, it was seen as a provisional framework which may be modified to the benefit of both the coach and the coachee (Maxwell, 2009; Baker, 2015).

In recent studies, Maxwell (2009) found that the supposition that coaching only addresses professional issues is unsubstantiated. In particular, if coaching is required to address developmental issues the distinction between coaching and counselling becomes increasingly hard to define (Bachkirova, 2007). Coaches report that, far from being clearly separated,

professional and personal matters are tightly interwoven. Coaches need to be equipped to work with the 'whole messy human', including the coachee's emotions and past, as well as their performance targets. For new coaches and those without a psychological background, it is important to know themselves and understand their capabilities. In effect, those with less experience or knowledge need to be aware of working within their competencies (Baker, 2015).

The difference in contracting in coaching and therapy as described above already differentiate these practices. However, the focus on a different role that the coach may play also emphasise that in order to create equal relationship with the coachee, contracting should involve a discussion about mutual responsibilities and potential obstacles to their collaboration.

### *Implications for coachees*

It is important that potential coachees are aware of the collaborative nature of coaching and their responsibilities in this process. This could be done during the contracting stage and also made clear that throughout the process various decisions about content of the discussion, pace of work and changes of direction need to be made together.

Organisational structures and supposed expectations may influence the support coachees seek. Considering many may continue to work with mental health issues, employees may feel they would be seen as 'weak' if they expressed their emotions or indicated any psychological distress (Baker, 2015). Coachees may therefore seek coaching for stress, as stress could be associated with working hard, when in reality they need counselling support. Whilst many large organisations are actively introducing mental health support (BITC, 2015), research has indicated that some do not openly support their employees with counselling services (Baker, 2015). As a consequence coaches with a therapeutic background may be chosen to coach clients who exhibit deeper psychological issues. Indeed, it could be suggested that the public may perceive coaching as an acceptable form of therapy (Williams, 2003).

The client's choice of supportive service and the content they choose to share may have a profound impact on boundaries in practice. The client appears to play an active role in the co-creation of boundaries. Rather than being fixed, the client's boundaries maybe malleable within the context of the helping relationship. As clients develop trust and a sense of security from the support provided by the practitioner, they may risk appearing vulnerable. Within the supportive space created by the helping relationship, they may consciously or unconsciously renegotiate their personal boundaries. Indeed, it could be argued that, rather than theoretical boundaries, parameters of practice are created by a dynamic interplay between practitioner and the client's personal boundaries. It would therefore seem imperative that coaches have adequate skills and self awareness to manage boundary transitions.

As the coaching may become developmental rather than performance-oriented, the expectations of the coachee for specific and significant changes dictate that the coach is responsible for informing the coachee about the scale of issues involved in the process of change and for the degree of unpredictability in terms of reaching the specific outcomes that the coachee may expect. Coachees certainly have to be involved in the decision making process about the changes in the nature of the coaching process that could affect the

outcome. This is dictated by the assumption of equal responsibility of a coach and a coachee in relation to the outcomes of the coaching process.

### *Implications for educators of coaching*

The most difficult task in regards to the challenge of clarifying the boundaries between therapy and coaching seems to fall on educators of coaching as they are in the front line and expected to provide certainty that novice coaches are striving for. Whilst executive coaches argue that coach training could be less rigorous than counselling training (Turner, 2010), many have argued that psychological knowledge and an awareness of mental health issues should be a core aspect of training programmes (Cavanagh, 2005; Maxwell, 2009). However, this is possible to a limited degree for the reason that we discussed in this chapter. Although identifying and making decision in cases that involve mental health issues needs more guidance for all coaches (Cavanagh and Buckley, 2014) and could be useful even for a lay person, a more honest way for educators is to acknowledge that their training and education cannot provide novices with certainty in this regard.

The nature of this issue is that in relation to the most serious warnings about working with unrecognised mental health issues the guidelines could only be rather general (Cavanagh, 2005). Even if the educator were to ignore the issue with diagnosis of mental health and wished to give some guidelines, in reality the time available for delivering such information is insufficient. Mental health problems can be difficult to identify. For example, there are many similarities between the symptoms of stress and depression. The educators of coaching are not specialists in mental health issues and can only offer a very superficial scans of tables with description of mental disorders, which would be of limited use for those who are unqualified to make such judgments.

However, if we consider a distinctive feature between therapy and coaching as discussed in this chapter we can argue that coaches do not need to present themselves as experts, particularly in mental health issues. They have to be open about their role and capabilities and share with their coachees responsibility for making decisions whether to continue coaching or seek help from a different specialist when required. Various modes of working can also be considered in each particular case.

It would be good, at the same time, if educators focused on personal development of coaches as well as professional. Coaches should learn as much as possible about the theories and practice of coaching, but approach coaching engagements from the position of the collaborative explorer able to facilitate a process of joint meaning making. This way of coaching is not as easy as it might seem in comparison to presenting oneself as an expert. The role of an expert provides certain security and attractive status that are difficult to give up. In right education, however, coaches may learn to rely on who they are as people, the quality of attention they can provide and their skills of creating a balanced relationship in terms of power.

### *Implication for coaching supervision*

If coaching boundaries with therapy are defined in the way presented in this chapter supervision becomes one of the most important element of coaching practice (Butwell, 2006; Slater, 2008; McGiver, 2009; Bachkirova et al, 2011). Not playing an expert and approaching each engagement with consideration of context and complexity involved in understanding coachees' issues brings to light a need to explore and reflect on this complexity with an experienced supervisor. This is essential because coaches do not rely on the prescribed and

routinized approaches; they engage in the process on an equal basis which may lead to unexpected results. The issues that may come up in coaching may be testing their capabilities to uncomfortable levels. They may require making important decisions in relation to hypothetical boundaries with other practices or being creative and work in a fuzzy spaces between different practices. Supervisors can help to explore these complex situations and also model for coaches the way of working as a collaborative explorer.

### Discussion points

1. What are the differences between coaches who believe in clear boundaries between coaching and counselling and coaches who do not?
2. What obstacles might stand in the way of a wider spread of the amalgamated practices?
3. What features of developmental coaching lead to transcendence of the boundaries between coaching and counselling?
4. What obstacles might hinder the shift of focus from the coach as an expert to coaching as a collaborative process?

### Recommended reading

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