

Exploring the evolution of coaching through the lens of innovation

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine coaching's innovativeness through a comparison of its approaches and methods with those of more established helping professions. Using extant literature, we consider the nature of innovation before going on to examine coaching's core beliefs and values, theoretical paradigms, and its goals, techniques, and methods. Findings suggest that some aspects of coaching can be described as incrementally innovative, deriving from an adaptation of existing approaches. Seemingly, coaching's most innovative elements are represented in its techniques and methods.

Keywords: coaching, innovation, coaching philosophy, psychotherapy, counseling

Introduction

In contextualising this examination of the innovative nature of coaching, it is important to recognise at the outset that coaching has been richly informed by theories and practices originating in more established helping professions (Ellis, 2006). If, as Schein (2009) asserts, formal help occurs when one person who has specific professional training assists another person either to solve a problem or to help that person achieve a particular goal, then coaching can be readily located within the domain of helping professions. This is further reflected in how coaching shares with many other helping professions a structuring of one-to-one relational processes intended to serve client growth (Biswas-Diener, 2009; Skovholt, 2005).

With this context in mind, we will first attempt to portray certain characteristics of the coaching field amidst its rapid development. We then offer a framework for examining coaching through a lens of innovation. From here, we proceed to describe our method of study and the findings from our inquiry.

The evolution of coaching

It is perhaps a daunting task to draw boundaries around the rapidly evolving field of coaching. In its brief history, the coaching field has reflected at least three distinctly different approaches (goal-oriented, therapeutic, and personal development), each of which appears to focus on different goals and implies different roles for coaches (Ives, 2008). Added to the challenge of clarifying boundaries is a seeming proliferation of coaching definitions (Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013; Hawkins, 2008; Ives, 2008; Jarosz, 2016). While the International Coach

Federation's (ICF) definition seems to capture the intention of coaching interventions, it unintentionally supports a certain ambiguity in meaning. According to the ICF (2016a), "coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential." Beyond approaches and definitions, the coaching field has also produced an array of tools and techniques that have been espoused for the promotion of human growth and goal attainment (Grant, 2001). To find their place in such a rapidly evolving field, coaches will often align themselves with particular coaching niches or genres. For instance, Kauffman and Bachkirova (2009a) catalogued nine major coaching niches, which they labeled as follows: executive, life, career, team, high potential, health, development, performance, and supervision.

Even with this diversity, the core work of coaching generally fits a pattern of meeting with clients in one-to-one sessions for conversations focused on achieving client goals (Flaherty, 2010; Ives, 2008; Ives & Cox, 2012). This process of coaching might be conducted in person, via telephone or on web platforms (e.g., Skype), but might also include email and other types of communication (Biswas-Diener, 2009; Kauffman & Bachkirova, 2008). Irrespective of the focus of a coaching session, coaches would typically strive to foster insight and guide clients toward goal-related action commitments (Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013).

For all that it encompasses, coaching has largely been identified as an original and innovative field of helping (Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). Whitmore (1994), one of the early coaching pioneers, argued that coaching is a distinctly new field - though he also cautioned that "the popularizing of this new term [coaching] has led both the well-meaning and the unscrupulous to apply it to their old wares. Consequently, coaching is in danger of being misrepresented, misperceived, and dismissed as not so new and different" (p. 1). Similarly, Hargrove (1995) positioned coaching as a new form of management focusing on the empowerment of people; as such, he referred to it as a workplace innovation. Additionally, Whitworth, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl (1998) presented their co-active coaching model as a new approach that "involves the active and collaborative participation of both the coach and the client" (p. xi).

Understanding innovation

The term innovation can be traced to the Latin verb 'innovare', which means to make new, renew, or alter (Oxford Dictionaries). AbuJarad and Yusof (2010) emphasised creation as the essential element of innovation. In fact, the majority of definitions for the term focus on aspects of novelty and newness (Goswami & Mathew, 2005; Rowley, 2011). For instance, Tekic, Cosic, and Katalinic (2011) defined innovation as "a sustainable and value-adding solution to a problem that is created by applying the new or recombining the existing knowledge" (p. 419).

While incorporating a sense of creativity, innovativeness, and invention (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010), innovation is thought to take form through its capacity to transform knowledge and ideas into novel products, processes, and systems (Popa, Preda, & Boldea, 2010). Resulting innovations may then be categorised as either radical (considered fundamentally new

or different) or incremental (minor improvements) in nature (Beverland, Napoli, Farrelly, 2010; Chandy & Tellis, 2000; Popa et al., 2010).

AbuJarad and Yusof (2010) further distinguished between innovation creation and innovation adoption (or diffusion). Innovation creation entails coming up with a unique product or service (radical innovation creation), or a partially unique product or service (incremental innovation creation) (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010). However, innovation extends beyond the realm of invention by encompassing processes of adoption or implementation of inventions (Denning, 2012). Rogers (1995), a leading figure in the study of innovation adoption or diffusion, clarified the matter by defining diffusion “as the process by which innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (p. 5). In this perspective, innovation adoption may be seen to occur when a system completely or partially adopts an existing product, process, or technology with or without making improvements or changes (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010).

In brief, assessing what is novel (innovation creation) about coaching requires a different perspective than analysing how coaching has been adopted over time (innovation adoption). Earlier studies pertaining to coaching innovation seem to have emphasised an innovation adoption approach. For example, Brock (2008) applied the adoption approach in her historical analysis of the emergence of coaching, while Grant (2010) studied the adoption of workplace coaching skills. In other respects, the literature contains discussions of how coaching differs from psychotherapy (Biswas-Diener, 2009; Griffiths & Campbell, 2008), how coaching psychology continues to innovate (Palmer & O’Riordan, 2011), and how coaching has emerged as a field (Brock 2008, 2012). To our knowledge, however, a systematic analysis of innovations in coaching has yet to be made.

Innovation creation in coaching

A primary concern was how best to go about exploring innovation creation in coaching. We chose to examine coaching in a comparative framework with other one-to-one helping professions, specifically those of counseling and psychotherapy, through a detailed examination of the various elements of coaching’s philosophy. Reflection on the philosophy of coaching is considered essential for effective practice (Askeland, 2009; Clutterbuck, 2010; Drake, Brennan, & Gortz, 2008). Grant (2011) described coaching philosophy as the “position that underpins and informs an individual’s coaching practice—the coach’s values, beliefs and assumptions about humans and the world, and how people can or should make purposeful change in their lives” (p. 34). Jenkins (2011) argued that a significant contribution to coaching philosophy stemmed from the sports coaching literature (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004), where professional philosophy was defined as:

The consultant’s beliefs and values concerning the nature of reality ... and also the consultant’s beliefs and values concerning his or her potential role in, and the theoretical and practical means of, influencing their clients toward mutually set intervention goals (p. 449).

Based on this definition, we identified a limited set of central components of coaching philosophy for our analysis; these included: (a) core beliefs and values, (b) theoretical paradigms, and (c) coaching goals, techniques, and methods.

Methodology

For this investigation, the scope was limited to an exploration of the literature of coaching and that of the related professions of counseling and psychotherapy. We realised that comparisons with other forms of helping relationships such as those found in consulting, training, social work, and education would add breadth to this study, but reasoned that comparisons with counseling and psychotherapy would be particularly appropriate as a first step in this kind of examination of innovation. Nevertheless, this choice limits our study's generalisability.

The search examined popular coaching books published between 1990 and 2016, and academic papers published between 2000 and 2016 that focused on approaches and methods of coaching. The following databases were used: Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Entrepreneurial Studies Source, MEDLINE, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycINFO, SocINDEX, and SPORTDiscus. Search terms for coaching articles included "life coach*" "personal coach*" "professional coach*" and "executive coach*." Coaching trade journals and newsletters, as well as documents from coaching organisations and programs, were not incorporated in this review. Given the extensive literature on counseling and psychotherapy, we elected to sample publications that seemed most pertinent. We reviewed academic papers published between 1990 and 2016, and chose ones that seemed most relevant to a comparison with coaching. Further, we referenced certain seminal humanistic writings (vis., Maslow 1962; Rogers, 1961) and major textbooks on individual counseling and psychotherapy (Corey, 2013; Corsini & Wedding, 2011; Norcross & Goldfried, 2005; Prochaska & Norcross, 2013). Admittedly, there is a subjective quality to our review that must be acknowledged.

Findings and Discussion

This section is divided into three sub-sections, each of which reviews the literature pertaining to one of the themes identified above: a) core beliefs and values, (b) theoretical paradigms, and (c) coaching goals, techniques, and methods.

Core Beliefs and Values

Poczwadowski et al. (2004) argue that a professional's philosophy is founded on "innermost beliefs and values regarding the world and human behavior" (p. 449). These beliefs are thought to guide the way professionals view human nature, behavior change and growth. Bachkirova, Clutterbuck, and Cox (2010) advocate that coaching professionals need to develop a coherent philosophical framework to inform their coaching practice, based on a rationale adapted to their particular practice. From a psychotherapeutic perspective, Corey (2013) asserts that therapists need to be aware of their philosophical assumptions, which influence what they perceive and what they are looking to see.

Coaching includes single-theory coaching perspectives (e.g., humanistic, behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, and psychoanalytic; Passmore, 2006; Stober & Grant, 2006) and integrative or cross-theory approaches (Palmer & Whybrow, 2007; Stober & Grant, 2006), which incorporate varying beliefs and values about human nature. Similarly, approaches to psychotherapy and counseling have philosophies and views of human nature (Corey, 2013; Prochaska & Norcross, 2013) that range in perspectives about human nature. For example, Corey (2013) identified eleven psychotherapy or counseling approaches—many with subtly or fundamentally different assumptions about human nature.

When coaching beliefs are examined more closely, it appears that this emerging profession is most closely aligned with core beliefs underpinning humanistic psychology (Askeland, 2009; Spence, 2007; Williams, 2008). Stober (2006) explained that humanistic therapies and coaching share basic philosophical assumptions centered on clients' driving forces for positive change. In particular, Stober believed that "the humanistic theory of self-actualization is a foundational assumption for coaching with its focus on enhancing growth rather than ameliorating dysfunction" (p. 17-18). Askeland (2009) also emphasised the humanistic view expressed in coaching: "the nature of human beings in coaching is that of an autonomous, goal oriented individual, able to and responsible for creating the meaning and essence of their lives" (p. 67).

Brock (2012) wrote, "humanistic psychology is clearly the cornerstone of coaching's foundation" (p. 65) and many of the early coaching pioneers, implicitly or explicitly, expressed a humanistic coaching philosophy. Humanistic philosophical assumptions can be seen to underlie Whitmore's (1994) coaching approach, as suggested in the following expressions: "journey of self-discovery" (p. 1), "experience a sense of making a real contribution" (p. 26), and "a coaching outlook regards all people as having the potential to be great in their chosen field, just as an acorn has the potential to become a towering oak tree" (p. 109-110). Maslow's (1962) theory of self-actualisation and Roger's (1961) concept of the fully functioning person, as well as other humanistic perspectives of growth and development, are often referenced as ideals for coaching practice (Spence, 2007). John Whitmore wrote in the forward to another seminal coaching book that "the new genre of coaching based on humanistic and transpersonal psychological principles rejects much of old discredited behaviorism" (Whitworth et al., 1998, p. ix). The field of co-active coaching has articulated a strongly humanistic philosophy in its cornerstones of coaching. These included the belief that clients are "naturally creative, resourceful, and whole," that the agenda must come from the client, and that the relationship "is a designed alliance" (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 2007, p. 3).

Another hallmark of coaching is its advocacy of a strengths-based approach, rooted in a philosophical assumption that individuals are naturally inclined to develop their vast untapped potential (Stober, 2006). Comparatively, the field of positive psychology, which began to emerge distinctly around 1998 (Simmons, 2013), focuses on building positive emotion, engagement, and meaning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman (2007), often considered the father of positive psychology, believes that positive psychology can offer guidance to coaching's scope of practice. Components of a strength-based approach are evident in the writings of early coaching pioneers, John Whitmore (1994) and Robert Hargrove (1995), both of whom stressed

the necessity of embracing an optimistic model of people, rather than a dysfunctional one. Furthermore, guiding principles for coaching, as presented in one of the core textbooks in the field (Coach U, 2005), resemble the worldview articulated by many humanistic psychologists and positive psychology writers.

Discussion

Coaching shares many core beliefs and values with humanistic (Maslow, 1962; Rogers, 1961) and positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Thus, from an innovation perspective, the philosophical assumptions of coaching do not seem radically innovative (i.e., fundamentally new or different). Nonetheless, coaching may represent a unique expression of humanistic and positive psychology beliefs and values, which would constitute a form of incremental innovation creation (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010). Founding perspectives on coaching as represented in the works of Whitmore (1994), Whitworth et al. (2007), Hargrove (1995), and Coach U (2005) may be seen to offer a distinctive formulation of extant humanistic and positive psychology worldviews, articulated in a coaching framework. Spence (2007) observed that translation is necessary in order to apply the therapeutic theories and practices from humanistic psychology to coaching. For example, Spence encouraged coaching psychologists to become more active in the adaptation of therapeutic models for coaching.

In relation to whether coaching beliefs and values reflect innovation, Johnson (2010) identified adaptation or borrowing of ideas from a different field as a central part of invention and innovation, and it seems clear that coaches have borrowed ideas from different sources, including humanistic and positive psychology. However, our impression is that coaches have modified these beliefs and values sufficiently for this component of coaching philosophy to qualify as a form of incremental innovation.

Theoretical Paradigms

According to Poczwardowski et al. (2004), the major theoretical and philosophical paradigms of psychology “describe and explain human behavior and allow for successful attempts to predict and control behavior change” (p. 451). With the development of new theories and models, psychotherapy and counseling practice reflect openness towards systematic eclecticism, such that one can argue that eclecticism is widely practiced in these fields (Corey, 2013; Gelso, 2011; Lampropoulos, 2001). Similarly, it may be said that while some coaches base their practice on a particular theoretical framework, an eclectic perspective may better describe the approach taken by most coaches in their practices (Clutterbuck, 2010; Turner & Goodrich, 2010). The literature even suggests that due to the multidisciplinary nature of coaching, eclecticism seems inherent in the field (Brock, 2008, 2012; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Williams, 2008). Grant (2011) explicitly frames coaching as an eclectic practice: “coaches draw on a broad range of techniques and adapt them for use with clients in line with their clients’ specific needs. Indeed, eclecticism has been evident since the beginnings of the contemporary coaching literature” (p. 34). Similarly, Cox (2013) reports a pragmatic eclectic approach whereby coaches “take the theories, tools and techniques that they deem useful” (p. 1). Moreover, the sources contributing to eclectic practice in coaching extend beyond the literature of psychotherapy and counseling to include perspectives drawn from sports

psychology, organisational and management sciences, decision sciences, among others (Biswas-Diener, 2009).

Similarly, the psychotherapy and counseling literatures suggest that eclecticism, which is sometimes described as integration, is an appropriate framework for helping clients create change (e.g., Corey, 2013; Lazarus & Butler, 1993; Norcross, 2005; Norcross & Beutler, 2011). Gelso (2011) defined integration as “the combining or putting together of different elements into some broader element or whole” (p. 182). According to Corey (2013), “psychotherapy integration is best characterized by attempts to look beyond and across the confines of single-school approaches to see what can be learned from other perspectives and how clients can benefit from a variety of ways of conducting therapy” (p. 466). It appears that the majority of therapists and counselors label themselves as integrationists rather than as adherents of a singular theoretical approach (Norcross, 2005). As such, a systematic integrationist approach seems to be a major paradigm in of itself (Gelso, 2011). From this angle, the four most common approaches to psychotherapy integration can be identified as follows: technical integration, theoretical integration, common factors, and assimilative integration (Corey, 2013; Jenkins, 2011).

Technical integration is understood as the use of the best treatment technique for the individual and the issue, such that techniques or procedures are drawn from different theoretical approaches according to presumed relevance (Corey, 2013; Lampropoulos, 2001; Norcross & Beutler, 2011). Technical integration may be seen in the field of coaching under the heading of “managed eclecticism” (Clutterbuck, 2010); it is characterised by an intelligent and sensitive selection of tools and techniques from a broad array in order to suit the particular needs of a client at a specific time. Supporting this emphasis in coaching, numerous handbooks provide coaches with a compendium of tools and techniques from different disciplines (e.g., Stober & Grant, 2006; Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck, 2010; Passmore, 2006) that can be drawn upon to assist a technical integration approach.

Theoretical integration involves the conceptual synthesis of two or more therapeutic approaches and represents far more than a simple blending of techniques (Corey, 2013; Norcross & Beutler, 2011). Within the field of coaching, a prime example of theoretical integration can be found in schools of integral coaching, which derive from Wilber’s (2000, 2006) model that systematically brings together diverse theoretical frameworks (Divine, 2009; Flaherty, 2010; Hunt, 2009). Bachkirova et al. (2010) have shown how the application of Wilber’s (2000, 2006) model structures the knowledge base of coaching.

A common factors approach seeks to identify common elements shared across different therapies (Laska, Gurman, & Wampold, 2014); it is thought to be expressed in Rosenzweig’s (1936) dodo bird verdict: “everyone has won and all must have prizes” (Corey, 2013; Norcross & Beutler, 2011). Lambert and Bergin (1994) argued, “although there are a large number of therapies, each with its own rational and specific techniques, there is only modest evidence to suggest the superiority of one school or technique over another” (p. 161). Furthermore, they wrote, “it appears that what can be firmly stated is that factors common across treatments are accounting for a substantial amount of improvement found in psychotherapy patients” (p. 163).

The eleven core coaching competencies developed by the ICF seem to represent elements of a common factors orientation within the coaching field. The ICF (2016b) website indicates that the eleven core coaching competencies “were developed to support greater understanding about the skills and approaches used within today’s coaching profession as defined by the International Coach Federation.” Regardless of theoretical approach, the ICF’s eleven core competencies are viewed as essential for coaching (ICF, 2016b). For instance, the competency of coaching presence, defined by the ICF (2016b) as the “ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident,” would seem to exemplify a common factors approach in its trans-theoretical view.

Finally, assimilative integration occurs when different theoretical approaches are incorporated into one particular approach (Corey, 2013; Lampropoulos, 2001; Lazarus & Messer, 1991; Jenkins, 2011). Corey (2013) wrote, “assimilative integration combines the advantages of a single coherent theoretical system with the flexibility of a variety of interventions from multiple systems” (p. 467). An example of this form of integration is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which combines cognitive-behavioral theory with mindfulness techniques (Hayes, Levin, Plumb-Villardaga, Villatte, & Pistorello, 2013; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2011). Not surprisingly, the psychological principles and techniques of ACT have been adapted to coaching as well (Bionna, 2011).

In sum, there appears to be ample evidence of all four approaches to eclecticism in both the fields of coaching and psychotherapy. Of course, such approaches are often accompanied by warnings about creating a smorgasbord or “anything goes” type of eclecticism (Clutterbuck, 2010). Historically, Lazarus and Beutler (1993) cautioned against the unsystematic practice of melding disparate ideas into harmonious wholes, while more recently, Poczwardowski et al. (2004) reasoned that eclecticism “should be viewed as a creative synthesis of a number of perspectives and techniques with an underlying coherent and rigorous theoretical logic to it” (p. 453).

Discussion

Exemplars of systematic eclecticism in coaching appear to be similar to and well informed by eclecticism in psychotherapy and counseling. From our perspective, coaching seems to have largely appropriated eclecticism into its worldview (Grant, 2011; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Williams, 2008), rather than creating or adding anything novel to a paradigm of eclecticism. In this light, evidence of radical innovation creation (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010) is not evident in our review. However, elements drawn together to create eclectic approaches in psychotherapy and counseling are largely rooted in diverse psychological theories, methods, and techniques, while coaching seems to cast a much wider net, extracting principles and approaches from more diverse disciplines and professions. Eclecticism in coaching may include elements from management, sports, leadership studies, communications, systems theory, psychology, spirituality, philosophy, and adult education, among many others (Brock, 2011, 2012). Brock (2011) wrote that as the coaching field evolves the boundaries between fields become less clear: “coaching, leadership, therapy, organization development, and consulting boundaries are blurring rather than sharpening” (p. 86). In other words, the coaching field seems to be exceptionally open to the adaptation of different ideas (Johnson,

2010) deriving from a wide range of disciplines, to a degree that might be considered unacceptable by practitioners in more traditional disciplines.

In regard to the field of coaching, Cavanagh and Lane (2012) wrote that “openness to, and application of, cross-disciplinary knowledge is critical to solving the complex problems that beset our clients” (p. 83). Perhaps this allows us to argue that coaching demonstrates a degree of incremental innovation (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010) as seen in its sourcing of theoretical paradigms from wide-ranging fields. However, a question that arises is whether some of coaching’s eclecticism has more of a hodgepodge quality (Clutterbuck, 2010) than one of systematic integration (Gelso, 2011). This concern derives from a sense that while coaching appears to have no limits to its sources of theory, there appears to be only limited evidence of systematically integrated frameworks (cf. Cox, 2013; Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013; Ives & Cox, 2012).

Coaching Goals, Techniques, and Methods

Coaching goals

Poczwardowski et al. (2004) wrote that consultants differ “philosophically on the issue of what is or should be the goal of an intervention....the specified intervention goals are also a function of contextual features of each consulting relationship and previous experiences with specific intervention techniques and methods” (p. 457). Coaching often emphasises the achievement of a goal, beyond an exploratory process of problem analysis, as well as incorporating systematic support that fosters growth and change (Ives, 2008; Ives & Cox, 2012). In essence, coaching has been advanced as a dream fulfillment kind of personal change strategy (Auerbach, 2003; Flaherty, 2010; Whitworth et al., 2007). In contrast, Skibbins (2007) wrote, “therapy involves the implementation of a treatment plan with the help and guidance of a trained therapist, to help a client resolve a life problem” (p. 31), thereby positioning psychotherapy as having a strong problem-resolution focus. Grant (2003) captures the goal differences by framing psychological work as being directed toward lessening present dysfunction, while coaching is perceived as being oriented toward future growth. Further, coaching appears to require that ‘coachable’ clients have high motivation for goal-achievement and a sufficiently high level of functioning to reliably pursue paths of committed action. By contrast, psychotherapy and counseling tend to have a strong emphasis on pain relief through increased self-understanding and psychological forms of healing (Steele, 2011). As well, clients’ resistance to treatment is often discussed in the literature of psychotherapy (Ellis, 2002; Muntigl, 2013), whereas in the coaching literature resistance is given little attention with the exception of psychodynamic approaches to coaching (de Haan, 2011). In spite of these apparent differences, there may be more overlap between coaching and psychotherapy goals than the literature above suggests (Griffiths & Campbell, 2008b).

Intervention goals in coaching may be sorted into two categories: to modify individual’s actions or behavior (external) or to change individual’s attitudes (internal) (Ives, & Cox, 2012; Peltier, 2001). Similarly, one might argue that different approaches to psychotherapy and counseling emphasise either changing the patient’s internal representations (e.g., psychoanalytic approaches, existential psychotherapy) or focusing largely on external modifications (e.g., behavior and cognitive behavior therapy) (Corey, 2013). Moreover,

Brockbank (2008) offered the dimensions of equilibrium (where coaching targets improvement) and transformation (where coaching targets radical change) in her map of coaching approaches, which can also be understood in a psychotherapeutic context where the goal may be modest behavior change or personality restructuring. In this light, when we dip beneath the surface to determine whether change is about rehabilitation (psychotherapy) or growth (coaching), there may be aspects of the locus of the goal (internal vs. external) and its scope (targeted vs. transformative) that resonate in both coaching and psychotherapeutic experiences (Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013; Stober, 2013).

Coaching techniques

The employment of diverse intervention techniques varies greatly as a result of the dynamic context within which professionals operate (Poczwadowski et al., 2004). These techniques include such basic skills as listening, asking questions, giving feedback, and action planning. While coaches rely heavily on such skills in their work (Rogers, 2012; Starr, 2011), these types of interventions have long characterised the practice of counseling and psychotherapy (Williams, 2008). For instance, “active listening” and “powerful questioning,” two core coaching competencies identified by the ICF (2016b), represent essential skills in psychotherapy and counseling (Corey, 2013; Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013). Of course, when these skills are applied, they may be in service of different goals. As Williams and Davis (2007) noted, the focus of psychotherapy and counseling is different from coaching: “traditional psychotherapy focuses on the root of the problem, the history, the family of origin, the everything of origin! Coaching, from a theoretical perspective focuses on the future, barrier identification, goal setting, planning, and creative action” (p. 46).

Concern has been raised that while coaches draw upon a variety of techniques originating in psychotherapy and counseling, they are not always aware of the roots and intentions of these techniques (Rogers, 2012). Optimistically, we would hope that coaches are able to trace these techniques back to their particular theoretical origins (Cox, 2013). Grant (2001) cautioned that some clinically-derived techniques have a problem-focus and may be counterproductive for coaching clients. However, given the goals of their clients, coaches are most likely to intervene in order to stimulate creativity, uncover motivation, identify resources, and plan action (Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013). The degree to which all of this differs from counseling and psychotherapy is hard to assess, even though it seems probable that therapists would also want to generate insight, increase motivation, discover resources, and plan for change with their clinical clients (Corey, 2013; Prochaska & Norcross, 2013).

One focus of techniques in coaching that seems almost universal is that of goal setting and action planning (Askeland, 2009; Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013; Griffiths & Campbell, 2008; Ives & Cox, 2012; Jarosz, 2016;). These are seen as a kind of *sine qua non* of coaching according to the ICF (2016b). Gavin and Mcbrearty (2013) identified action planning as the hallmark of the coaching field: “It’s not coaching unless there is action that is planned and reliably engaged” (p. 105). Though the importance of setting specific and realistic goals has been extensively considered in other helping relationships (e.g., Locke & Latham, 2002), its centrality to the practice of coaching is unarguable (Grant, 2001).

Coaching methods

The effectiveness of coaching has often been attributed to its inventive and adaptable methods that allow personalised processes for coaching clients (Jarosz, 2016; Kauffman & Bachkirova, 2008; Williams & Davis, 2007). Though the methods of coaching delivery, which include the duration and frequency of coaching sessions, as well as where coaching sessions occur, are typically defined in a coaching agreement, they may also be creatively designed in the context of a client's particular needs (Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013).

In general, coaching occurs within a flexible communication structure that includes modern technology, as well as more traditional face-to-face meetings (Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013). Unrestrained by some of the traditions of other helping disciplines, many coaches conduct coaching sessions over the phone, by Skype, and even by e-mail. The ease of access to coaching is certainly aided by technology (Kauffman & Bachkirova, 2008). Coaches tend to make greater use of web platforms, online assessments, e-mail, and telephone when compared to therapists and counselors (Biswas-Diener, 2009). In contrast, most therapists and counselors are accustomed to fixed-length (e.g., 50-minute) in-person sessions (Williams & Davis, 2007). However, it should be noted that in recent years, evidence of phone-based psychotherapy seems to be on the rise (Bauer & Moessner, 2013; Richards, 2013).

Discussion

Coaching's unwavering focus on personal development differs significantly from psychotherapy and counseling's emphasis on rehabilitation and the alleviation of human suffering (Bachkirova & Kauffman, 2009b; Skibbins, 2007; Steele, 2011), though this is to be expected given the natures of these fields. Interventions in coaching often have a future outcome or goal-focused purpose (Ives, 2008; Ives & Cox, 2012; Jarosz, 2016) that distinguish it from psychotherapy and counseling's personality restructuring and problem-centered focus (Williams & Davis, 2007). Even though the psychological literature reveals ample emphasis on growth and self-actualisation (e.g., Maslow, 1962; Rogers, 1961), the primacy of growth, change, and actualisation in coaching fully characterises this field. However, had our comparison been with a profession such as management consulting, we believe there would be little evidence supporting innovation creation (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010).

In considering techniques, we surmise that coaching draws significantly from the techniques of psychotherapy and counseling (Griffiths & Campbell, 2008; Williams, 2008), while coaching's persistent focus on goal setting and action seems distinct. Coaching's combination of goal setting and action planning (Grant, 2011) depict the field to such a degree that it may support an argument for radical innovation creation (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010). Again, we would want to extend our comparisons to other helping fields before reliably asserting this assessment. Perhaps more justifiably, coaching's heavy reliance on diverse forms of communication and technology (e.g., web platforms, phone, Skype, and e-mail) as well as its adaptability in terms of meeting location and formats would more likely constitute a widespread departure from the traditional practices of psychotherapy and counseling, as well as perhaps other helping fields including consulting. In this regard, coaching's methods may well represent an example of radical innovation creation (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010).

Conclusion

Coaching has been positioned as a model for innovation and practice in the 21st century (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Lenhardt, 2004), and as a kind of meta-profession that encompasses many of the older helping professions (Gray, 2011; Lenhardt, 2004). Yet, one of the greatest difficulties in discussing coaching is that it can be so many things (Brock, 2008, 2011; Gavin & Mcbrearty, 2013; Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Hawkins, 2008). As Bachkirova and Kaufman (2009a) remarked, coaching may sometimes appear to be an assortment of approaches and techniques unique to each practitioner. But then, might this also be true of the broad field of counseling and psychotherapy?

Given the diversity of definitions and applications of coaching, we nonetheless hoped the literature would allow us to gain a deeper appreciation of coaching philosophy from the perspective of innovation creation (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010). Utilising Poczwardowski et al.'s (2004) conceptualisation of professional philosophy, our review suggests that the coaching field may well have a number of elements that are incrementally innovative (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010). It seems fair to say that the coaching field, in general, may be characterised by a belief system grounded in humanistic and positive psychology. Though founders of the coaching field may not have originated these perspectives, they not only expressed them in a unique way tailored to the work of coaches (e.g., Coach U, 2005; Hargrove, 1995; Whitmore, 1994; Whitworth et al., 2007), but they also spoke for the profession as a whole rather than, as in psychology, a portion of the field. Moreover, as a multidisciplinary and eclectic field (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Williams, 2008), coaching pushes the limits of eclecticism further than psychotherapy and counseling by embracing a wide range of disciplines far beyond the bounds of psychology, psychiatry, and social work. We also believe that the ubiquitous emphasis on action planning and goal-focused strategies (Grant, 2011; Ives, 2008; Ives & Cox, 2012) in coaching clearly distinguish it from the nature of help in psychotherapy and counseling. Finally, coaching's flexible methods of delivery and openness to use of technology (e.g., phone, Skype, and e-mail) seems to represent a radically innovative (AbuJarad & Yusof, 2010) shift from the traditional office-based sessions in psychotherapy and counseling.

In all of this, we acknowledge a major limitation of our work arising from a restricted base of comparisons. We focused only on the comparison of coaching to counseling and psychotherapy, rather than extending our effort to include other relevant helping professions. Future research that includes a wider range of helping professions would allow a more complete examination of innovation creation in coaching.

Another kind of comparison that seems warranted might be situated within the field of coaching itself. Despite our introductory remarks signifying the challenge of drawing boundaries around the coaching field, we positioned coaching as a kind of monolithic system in this exploration. Given the field's impressive growth, might it be time to explore these same philosophical questions as they pertain to different approaches or paradigms of coaching (Ives, 2008; Stober & Grant, 2006)? As Ives noted, the three coaching approaches he identified seem to be based on differing coaching philosophies and methodologies (p.101). An investigation of the professional philosophies within these approaches should provide clarity about the coaching field by articulating similarities and differences in its streams of thought and practice.

From a practice perspective, what do our findings offer? For one, the strong association of coaching's core values and beliefs with those of humanistic and positive psychologies provides guidance to practitioners about sources of related knowledge for their work. Secondly, our results concerning the theoretical bases of coaching legitimise practitioners' efforts to cast a wide net in sourcing models and strategies that inform their work. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, our findings support the belief that coaching can be distinguished in positive ways from other helping professions; it is not simply more of the same. For instance, coaches can justly take pride in evidence attesting to 'cutting edge' elements of practice, such as that found in its adaptations of technology and methods of delivery.

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