

How do novice business coaches identify the boundary between coaching and counselling?

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Abstract

The coaching/counselling boundary is much talked about and yet there has been little research into how novice coaches identify the boundary in practice. This article explores how novice business coaches attempt to identify the boundary in their practice. The research employs a constructivist grounded theory approach, with seven novice business coaches and four coach supervisors. Findings suggest a theoretical framework consisting of three broad categories, each with several sub-themes, including the emotional current, gaining knowledge and abilities and defining the boundary. They also highlight some of the key challenges experienced by novice coaches.

Key words: coaching-counselling boundary, coaching-therapy boundary, coach development, novice learning.

Introduction

Coaching and counselling are both help-by-talking services that aim to help individuals achieve growth and change in some area of their life. Both practices draw upon similar approaches, techniques and skills (Popovic & Boniwell, 2007); yet, have sought to differentiate themselves. Coaching in particular, has created distinct areas of practice that reflect the diversity of practitioners' professional backgrounds, additional skills and knowledge (Baker, 2014; Bluckert, 2005b; De Haan *et al.*, 2011; Newsom and Bent, 2011; Zeus & Skiffington, 2007). Thus far, it has been difficult to understand how coaching differs from counselling in practice and attempts to separate them often prove somewhat artificial (Popovic & Boniwell, 2007). Yet, as coaching continues to evolve, there will be an increase in the extent to which coaches need to recognise and manage the diversity and complexity of client issues, along with their suitability for coaching.

If the coaching industry is to ensure new coaches have the necessary knowledge and skills to practice safely and within the limits of their abilities, greater understanding is required of some of the key aspects of their learning experiences and processes. Yet, there appears to be little research into practitioners' perceptions of the boundary and only one broadly scoped study pertaining to novice coaches (Baker, 2014). Therefore, the aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of novices' experiences of the coaching/counselling boundary and to generate theory as a result. The question asked is - how do novice business coaches identify the boundary between coaching and counselling?

This paper presents the key aspects of the literature review pertaining to the research problem, the research design and approach, a summary of the main research findings and the resulting theoretical framework. The paper will conclude with the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

Literature

Coaching is often defined as being future-orientated and aimed only at those who are psychologically healthy, while counselling is portrayed as past-focused and concerned with dysfunctional or clinical populations (Grant, 2005). Such seemingly neat distinctions have helped to maintain a sense of separateness between the two professions, but in practice, counsellors are equally concerned with the present and future wellbeing and happiness of clients (Spinnelli, 2008) and many coaches acknowledge the link between a client's past and present behaviour patterns (Bachkirova, 2007; Bachkirova & Cox, 2005).

However, one consistent theme across all definitions is the coach's intention to help the client by facilitating performance improvement in some domain of the client's life, in a way that enhances their effectiveness (Hamblin *et al.*, 2008; Bono *et al.*, 2009). Unfortunately, the somewhat territorial debates have often resulted in coaching definitions that are vague, generic and create confusion for clients and new coaches alike (Bachkirova & Kauffman, 2009; Baker, 2014).

Therefore, this study will draw upon Bluckert's definition of coaching, which acknowledges that the attainment of goals and performance improvement also involves learning and change for the individual:

Coaching is the facilitation of learning and development with the purpose of improving performance and enhancing effective action, goal achievement and personal satisfaction. It invariably involves growth and change, whether this is in perspective, attitude or behaviour. (Bluckert, 2006: 3)

There are two main types of coaching – life coaching and organisational coaching, that are treated differently in the literature (Price, 2009). Life coaching is concerned with helping individuals in non-work or non-organisational contexts (Grant, 2003), whereas organisational coaching is concerned with the development and performance of individuals and managers in organisations. The terms organisational coaching and executive coaching are used interchangeably, although executive coaching is most frequently targeted at managers and senior executives (Grant *et al.*, 2010; Stokes & Jolly, 2014). However, both terms tend to refer to coaching that takes place within medium to large, private sector organisations. The term business coaching includes managers and business owners, as well as individuals in both public and private sector organisations (Zeus & Skiffington, 2007). Therefore, Zeus and Skiffington's definition of business coaching will be used as a working definition, to include the types of clients encountered by the novice research participants in the study:

Business coaching can be applied to all types of businesses. It ranges from individual and executive team coaching in large corporations (including local authorities and public institutions), to coaching owners and managers of small to medium-sized businesses and other organizations. Business coaches help owners/managers and organizations to develop, promote and grow their business, their staff and themselves. (Zeus & Skiffington, 2007: 7)

In contrast to the focus on differences, others have sought to highlight the similarities between coaching and counselling, which appears to be a more constructive and inclusive approach, allowing for forward movement (Bachkirova & Cox, 2005). In fact, there is much support for the interrelatedness of counselling theory and coaching practice, along with arguments that the two practices have more similarities than differences (Baker, 2014;

Maxwell, 2009; Price, 2009). Several authors argue that contributions from other disciplines allow coaches to draw upon a wide range of perspectives, in order to help clients (Bennett & Bush, 2009; Grant & Jackson, 2004).

Clear distinctions between coaching and counselling prove problematic because both practices rely on some similar skills (Bachkirova and Cox, 2005; Baker, 2014; Bluckert, 2006; Maxwell, 2009; Price, 2009; Popovic & Boniwell, 2007) and clear delineations between aspects such as purpose, client population and process cannot be substantiated in practice. Coaching is an amalgamation of consulting, mentoring, counselling, and training (Bluckert, 2005b; Grant, 2005; Maxwell, 2009), that is proven to be effective in professional development, and in such a highly personal experience, issues of a personal and psychological nature will inevitably surface. As the field of coaching continues to evolve and grow in complexity, singular definitions prove too simplistic and unhelpful.

Further research into the nature of the boundary between coaching and counselling reveals more of a blurred and somewhat fluid intersection than a clearly demarcated line (Jopling, 2007; Maxwell, 2009). The blurred overlap has also been defined by a focus on the type of coaching undertaken (Bachkirova, 2007; Spinelli, 2008) and a transparent negotiation between coach and client (Maxwell, 2009). There are four main aspects to the blurred-boundary arguments. Firstly, they describe a continuum, along which the coach makes choices about how to operate that are largely down to individual interpretation (Price, 2009; Turner, 2010). Secondly, boundary identification highlights discrepancies between coaches' theoretical and operational definitions (Price, 2009). Although many coaches believe in the concept of a boundary, they struggle to clearly articulate how it manifests in practice (Baker, 2014). Thirdly, it is argued that many coaches appear to operate in areas that stray beyond their own definition of the boundary and possibly beyond the limits of their own competence (Bachkirova & Baker, 2016; Baker, 2014; Price, 2009). Finally, these three arguments suggest that the boundary appears to be a theoretical construct, serving to guide the coach's interventions.

It has been argued that novice coaches demonstrate confusion when trying to articulate where the boundary lies (Baker, 2014) and identification of the boundary in practice includes a sensed discomfort (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011), intuition and personal knowledge (Baker (2014). Baker also suggests that novice coaches might work beyond the limits of their competence and expresses an overall lack of confidence in their boundary identification abilities. However, all of Baker's participants were female and it is difficult to know what effect gender has upon the findings. In addition, half of the research interviews were conducted with students from the institution in which Baker is a faculty member. As such, it is possible that a perceived power imbalance might have affected participants' responses (Charmaz, 2014; Denscombe, 2014; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012).

Novice learning is governed by concept formation and adherence to rules (Bransford *et al.*, 2005; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Passmore & Goldrick, 2009), along with contextualisation difficulties (Daley, 1999). New learners can also be reluctant to apply new learning concepts to practice and often need reassurance in order to do so (Benner, 1984; Daley, 1999). However, many early, stage theories of development are overly focused on the acquisition of rational knowledge (Bachkirova & Cox, 2007; Bachkirova, 2016; Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2006) and often present a linear concept of professional expertise development, rather than the uneven nature of the developmental journey (Alvesson, 2001; Bachkirova, 2016; Cavanagh & Lane 2012; Garvey, 2011; Schön, 1987). Such theories are often unable to

clearly articulate what constitutes expertise (Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2006) and do not pay attention to the actual learning processes that novices develop (Daley, 1999).

More recently, the central relationship between coach and client has been argued to be one of the most significant factors contributing to effective outcomes in coaching (Bachkirova, 2016; Baron & Morin, 2009; De Haan *et al.*, 2011; De Haan *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, the personal qualities of the coach and their development as a person are important in the coaching process (Bachkirova, 2011; Bachkirova, 2016; De Haan *et al.*, 2011; De Haan *et al.*, 2013; Bono *et al.*, 2009; Egan, 2014). To this end, several authors argue for personal development for coaches (Bachkirova 2016; Baker, 2014, Bollich *et al.*, 2011).

Many knowledge theories suggest that learning is predominantly an internal, individualistic process, with no acknowledgement of the social context within which knowledge is created (Wenger, 2010; Drake, 2011). Yet, new learners often become part of a community of practice (Wenger, 2010), develop new perspectives (Boshuizen *et al.*, 2004) and therefore, experience a process of social identity development (Hogg, 2006). However, the field of coaching is not yet a formalised community of practice (Moore & Koning, 2016) and identity formation is a challenging, uncertain and gradual journey (Schön, 1987; Dall’Alba, 2009).

There are several challenges, identified in the literature, for the novice coach. These include the various definitions of coaching, the similarities between coaching and counselling, the increasing complexity and ambiguity as new knowledge emerges in the field of coaching. These challenges have led to shifts in attitudes, understanding and redefinitions of boundaries and safe practice. Furthermore, the nature of professional learning has also been revealed to be far more complex and diverse than originally thought. For this reason, novices may need to develop the capacity to work with greater complexity (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Methodology

A qualitative approach, employing constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) was applied to the research. Constructivist grounded theory rejects a single, objective reality and argues for the existence of multiple, relative realities (Charmaz, 2009; Charmaz, 2014). In addition, meaning and theory are not deemed to emerge out of the data in this view. Rather, theory is co-constructed between the researcher and research participants, in addition to the researcher’s interaction with the data and the interpretation of the findings (Charmaz, 2014).

Grounded theory is an inductive, iterative, comparative and emergent approach that seeks to understand the social, phenomenological processes of individuals or groups of individuals (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2011b; Glaser & Strauss, 2008). The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the processes by which novice coaches identify the boundaries between coaching and counselling and so a grounded theory approach is fitting. Finally, the practical nature of grounded theory methodology can also help to produce a theoretical framework by which to understand the research problem.

In classic grounded theory, the literature review is conducted after data analysis, in order to maintain theoretical sensitivity and to avoid forcing the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). Yet, to begin research without a review of the literature ‘implies a loss of knowledge’ (Thornberg, 2012: 245), might reduce the focus of the research question and undermine research effectiveness (Denscombe, 2014; McCallin, 2006). Both an initial literature review and the maintenance of theoretical sensitivity can be achieved, however, by using a constant

comparative process (Andrew, 2006; Hallberg, 2010), analytical memos and reflexivity (Dunne, 2011; Mills *et al.*, 2006; Thornberg, 2012). An initial review of the literature at the start of the study created a frame of reference for the research, served to guide the formulation of the research question and enabled alignment between the research question, the paradigm and methodological considerations (Moons, 2016).

Data collection and analysis

Participants were recruited nationally, by approaching post-graduate level coach training programmes. A purposive group of seven novice business coaches was identified, because it was essential that the majority of participants should have direct experience of the research phenomenon (Robinson, 2014). Four coach supervisors were included in the subsequent theoretical sampling stage, to create a final group of eleven participants. Supervisors were not interviewed as a separate group, because their role was to add further insight into the novices' experiences. The size of the participant group was deemed adequate and appropriate, given the richness of the ensuing data (Charmaz, 2014; Morse *et al.*, 2002).

Data analysis in grounded theory occurs in tandem with the data collection process (Glaser & Strauss, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). Theory construction begins from the start of the first iteration and is built up throughout each cycle of data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, analysis and theory construction began after the first iteration of three novice interviews. Four further novice interviews and four supervisor interviews served to shape, refine and check the theory construction (Charmaz, 2014).

A total of eleven participants were interviewed, using rich, semi-structured interviews. All interviews were between 60 to 90 minutes in length and transcribed verbatim, within 48 hours, by a professional transcription service. Coach interviews were conducted face-to-face in order to observe body language, vocal cues and emotions, whilst maintaining curiosity rather than interrogation (Charmaz, 2014). Supervisor interviews were conducted face-to-face or via Skype as the need for close observation was lessened; however, guidelines regarding privacy and clear internet connections were adhered to (Seitz, 2016). The background and demographic information of participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic information on participants

Participant Identifier	Sex	Age Group	Professional Background
Caroline (Novice)	F	> 30	Information Technology
Thomas (Novice)	M	> 30	Management Consulting
Sam (Novice)	M	> 40	Logistics
Steve (Novice)	M	> 40	Management Consulting
David (Novice)	M	> 40	Professional Services
Zoë (Novice)	F	> 40	Professional Services
Helen (Novice)	F	> 40	Learning and Development
Susan (Supervisor)	F	> 60	14 years supervisory experience
Mark (Supervisor)	M	> 50	5 years supervisory experience
Kate (Supervisor)	F	> 50	14 years supervisory experience
Gillian (Supervisor)	F	> 50	9 years supervisory experience

Initially, first cycle process coding was undertaken, using gerunds (Charmaz, 2003; Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 2006). However, the large number of process codes generated after the first interview would prove unmanageable within the

research timescale. Thereafter, data were broken into larger, appropriate segments, which is consistent with grounded theory methods (Glaser, 1992). Second cycle coding involved the use of focused codes (Charmaz, 2014). Here, theoretical categories were applied to other sections of the data or incidents, for comparison. Categories were also compared for patterns, relationships and connections in the whole process. Analytical memos were written throughout the data analysis phase, to capture insights, raise questions and ideas and identify new directions in theory construction. As new categories were raised from the data, the relevant literature was explored. Such explorations enabled explanation and understanding of collected data, as well as situating the study within the existing knowledge.

Findings

Three broad categories were constructed from the data, each with subsequent sub-themes: the emotional current; gaining knowledge and abilities; defining the boundary. The categories form a theoretical framework that helps to understand the key aspects involved in the boundary identification process of novice business coaches.

1. The Emotional Current

Findings from the study indicate that many novice coaches experience a high degree of emotion in relation to the boundary with the most commonly cited emotions being fear, anxiety, confusion, doubt and uncertainty. One novice expressed the emotional experience in the following way:

If I feel anything, I typically feel I've got a knotted stomach, heart pumping - oh and calm. I said to the supervisor...there's probably thirty feelings here, but I don't feel thirty, I only feel three.

Other novices expressed similar sentiments, suggesting that the strong emotions experienced in their early coaching practice are often perceived to be overwhelming, challenging and negative.

Daley's research (1999) into novice learning notes that everything is new to the novice, there is no ability to discriminate or prioritise the importance of events and such experiences can feel overwhelming. The findings from novices in the study appear to be consistent with these aspects of the literature. The feelings of confusion cited by the novices in the study are in line with the same feelings identified by Baker (2014).

A key aspect of the emotional current appears to be uncertainty with the majority of the novices in the study experiencing strong feelings of uncertainty, in relation to their coaching conversations. One novice described their experience thus:

I think it's probably the blind leading the blind in a sense...and if somebody starts doing something, you follow them. I worry that you do end up going beyond the boundary.

The feeling of uncertainty was linked to an inability to control the coaching conversation. All the novices in the study were of the belief that they were ultimately responsible for the direction of the coaching conversation and that feelings of uncertainty were related to their lack of coaching experience. Correspondingly, feelings of control were often associated with signs of positive development.

These findings are congruent with Bluckert's (2006) view that many coaches believe they can control the direction of the coaching conversation, while research by De Haan (2008), also highlights the same concerns from novices. However, Bluckert's further posits that the novice's assumptions of control and direction are illusory.

Another reason for the intense emotional experience mentioned by novices appears to be an awareness of a lack of resources. Such experiences, in addition to feelings of anxiety, can often generate doubt and confusion, leading to a lack of confidence; which are expressed in the following passage:

One of my challenges is to try and manage my own self-critique. There could be all manner of things that start to trigger that, in terms of an anxiety around the content, not knowing what to do, not even knowing how to make a judgement.

Baker (2014) also notes that novice coaches lack confidence in implementing strategies and doubt their own abilities. Daley argues that the novice's lack of resources, in the form of knowledge or experience, often places them in a position of unconscious incompetence (Daley, 1999) and the findings appear to be in keeping with these aspects of the literature.

The process of learning to identify the boundary between coaching and counselling appears to be charged with emotion for the novice coach. Heightened feelings may be experienced before initial coaching sessions with clients, due to a fear of making mistakes and transgressing the boundary, along with a sense of responsibility for another's wellbeing (Benner, 1982; Daley, 1999). Moreover, the novice might find that their definition of the boundary is challenged by the behaviour and emotion of clients, leaving them doubtful and uncertain. It is argued that emotion might play an important role in the novice's learning process, and that when faced with situations that they do not understand, emotions can become heightened (Baker, 2014; de Haan, 2008; Jarvis, 2006). Novices repeatedly mentioned the importance of emotional support, with supervision cited as a place to receive such support and to manage the intensity of the emotional experience.

The emotional current experienced by the novice coach appears to be something of a paradox. Continuous, strong, challenging emotions can shift attention from thought-action repertoires, overpower awareness and mask sensitivity to turning points in the coaching relationship (Day *et al.*, 2008). Yet, too little anxiety might also reduce the level of awareness required for boundary sensitivity and so the challenge for the novice coach is to learn how to regulate their emotions in the coaching experience. Research into mental health clinicians' boundary management processes (Gardner & McCutcheon, 2016) indicates that 'emotional tidiness' – a heightened sense of one's emotional state and the ability to self-regulate emotion – is a critical component of boundary identification and management.

2. Knowledge and Abilities

The novice coach's process of knowledge development appears to contain several challenges and since emotions often accompany learning (Day *et al.*, 2008; Jarvis, 2006), the emotional current appears affect knowledge development.

The novice coach often relies on structured knowledge, in the absence of experience (Baker, 2014; Bransford *et al.*, 2000), yet, also struggles to retain, recall and find the confidence to apply such knowledge in coaching experiences. As one novice put it, '*as part of our classes, we get deluged with models and techniques. And I'm thinking what was it again? What do I do? Which one do I go for?*' Therefore, the novice's knowledge may be little more than information memorisation at this point, since it is not rooted in experience (Jarvis, 2006).

Gaining experience

Gaining practical experience and ability was considered to be essential for all the novice coaches in the study, despite the emotional challenges. Although all gained experience with individual clients, several undertook regular peer coaching, as a part of their training program and found such experiences particularly useful, as one commented:

With our course, a lot of the things that are brought to coach practice, particularly as we got to know each other more, were some pretty full-on things. Having that experience of different people, with different issues in coaching practice was very useful.

Novice coaches share experiences with fellow learners as well as receiving knowledge and support from tutors and supervisors. Yet, the majority of their experiential knowledge is developed through practice with clients. As such, the novice coach appears to be individually responsible for many aspects of their own experiential knowledge development. This suggests that the norms, values and appreciations of a community of practice (Wenger, 2010), are not yet formalised in the coaching community. Therefore, the development of knowledge and experience is less of a social process, and more of an 'individualised, relational experience', leaving novice coaches to rely on themselves, much more (Moore and Koning, 2016: p: 32).

Personal knowledge

In the face of limited theoretical and experiential knowledge, several of the novices in the study drew upon personal knowledge in the form of experiences, beliefs, interpretation and personal theories (Baker, 2014). However, individuals often overestimate the accuracy of their insights into their own behaviour and decision-making (Baker, 2014; Dunning, 2013). Therefore, such types of knowledge are often more inaccurate and unreliable than individuals realise. One novice, in particular, soon realised the inaccuracy of his personal experiences in relation to his knowledge of mental health issues:

I think through my parents having depression issues, I'd probably feel quite comfortable in having a sense that somebody may have mental health issues...but I could doubt that because someone can present themselves at coaching on a positive...I've confused myself there really...if somebody had a will to hide their mental health issue of depression, I think they probably could.

Personal knowledge appears to be as much a part of the novice's process as other forms of knowledge, and seems difficult to separate. Individuals have beliefs, values, emotions and attitudes towards any knowledge that they are developing (Jarvis, 2012) and the challenge for the novice is to gain awareness of such factors and how they affect the coaching relationship (Bachkirova, 2016).

Intuition

Several novices believed that their growing use of intuition was a sign of deepening knowledge and growing confidence, yet were unable to explain what intuition consisted of. However, a supervisor-participant took a different perspective on the use of novice intuition:

Sometimes novices have a little bit of a tendency to be the amateur psychologist. They like to believe that they can ascribe what has happened [in the past] to now...I think that could be harmful. Now if all you do is use counselling skills...you are not trying to ascribe, you are not diagnosing. You are listening and being empathic. You are not doing therapy.

Cox (2013) argues that intuition also manifests in situations of high uncertainty and can be used with varying degrees of ability. This suggests that doubt and uncertainty might also be factors that propel the novice to act upon intuition. Furthermore, intuition can be viewed in two ways: Firstly, as the subconscious synthesis of a diverse range of experiences and secondly, as the automation of routinised expertise (Cox, 2013). Therefore, it is possible that the novice's intuition lacks a wide range of experiential information and, therefore, reliability (Baker, 2014).

Self-awareness

Those novices, for whom personal development was an integral part of the training program, and separate from supervision, appeared to be concerned with developing greater self-awareness in relation to boundary identification. They spoke of the boundary as more of a personal concept and supervisors experiences supported such views. Two novices made links between their self-awareness and the ability to help clients. One novice mentioned the significance of his own emotional development in the following way: *'The level of emotion that you're prepared to work with is directly related to how you are to the boundary.'* While another novice's thoughts on personal development were as follows:

The other thing that has become very apparent is your own personal development is actually professional development. So developing self and getting access to all different parts of yourself is going to influence how you can work with others.

The findings support Bachkirova's views, that personal development helps novices to better understand themselves, how they affect the coaching relationship and, in turn, lead to improved perception (Bachkirova, 2011; Bachkirova, 2016; Bollich *et al.* 2016). Finally, when viewed through the lens of self-knowledge, the findings suggest that the boundary appears to be more of a personal construct, linked to the novice's ability to work with the clients' issues, rather than a theoretical construct. In this way, who the novice is as a person might ultimately affect the way in which they engage with knowledge and identify boundaries (Bachkirova, 2016; Long, 2011).

The majority of the novices spoke of the knowledge derived from other sources such as supervision and peers. Examples were given of knowledge gained during supervision, when working with clients with more complex issues and gaining knowledge from peers: *'We actually had a CBT therapist on the course so it was quite interesting to hear her talk about the difference between how we were looking at things.'* Baker's views, that supervision can provide knowledge and self-awareness are supported by the findings (Baker, 2014).

3. Defining the Boundary

The novice coaches described coaching as present and future focused, concerned with the setting of goals, improving performance at work and dealing with psychologically healthy individuals, while counselling was described as past focused, dealing with personal problems and dysfunctions that are emotional or psychological in nature. Such theoretical definitions are supported by Baker's findings (Baker, 2014). The novices often appeared confident in their descriptions and it is possible that educators influenced their views. However, regardless of the way in which information is received, it appears that the novice is left to interpret the information individually.

When describing the similarities between the two practices, novices often identify abilities and skills such as listening, empathy, asking questions and attempting to understand another individual's meaning making. However, when attempting to define differences between techniques used, they often struggle, become confused and speak of the blurred and overlapping nature of the two practices (Baker, 2014). Some of the difficulties at this point also appear to be based on the fact that many novices have no real experience of counselling. Several confessed that they did not feel qualified to describe differences in techniques, did not know what a counselling style was, and that some responses were based upon imagination. For example, one novice noted that: *'Counselling tends to be more of a specific issue...I'm not really familiar with counselling. I don't know enough about whether or not it's directive.'*

When attempting to describe the nature of the boundary, novices' responses often reflect the vague and generic descriptions in the literature. However, those who were engaged in a more transactional style of coaching tended to clearly demarcate the boundary, referring to it as the point at which emotional and personal issues were discussed. By comparison, those novices who chose a more developmental style tended to describe the boundary as blurred or asserted that there was no real boundary between coaching and counselling. Again, it seems that educators have an influence upon the novice's descriptions.

Novice coaches' struggles to clearly articulate differences between coaching and counselling are consistent with the challenges identified by Baker (2014) and Price (2009). Both authors find that attempts to synthesise the many definitions and descriptions of the nature of the boundary result in generic, vague statements that are confusing and reflect the many different interpretations in the literature.

Beliefs regarding the nature and clarity of the boundary varied amongst the novices and even those attending the same coach training programs had slightly different interpretations of the information. Two novices on the same training program described the boundary in slightly different ways:

I've been taught in a way that I therefore sort of believe, that there really isn't that much of a boundary, in that you could be very much be in a sort of therapeutic place with a client and that's fine.

I think there's a greater awareness that that boundary exists and that through the type of coaching that I've been trained to do, I am likely to get there on a frequent basis... Once you start looking at adaptive change, then you're getting into the psyche and you're looking at stuff, which may or may not be counselling territory.

However, another novice described the boundary thus:

I was probably close to that boundary and I call that no-man's-land... the no-man's-land before the fence on the other side, which I would say is into the therapy side...but the bit in the middle is probably an uncomfortable zone, where the risks are higher... because that's the minefield area, where you might get your leg blown off.

The findings suggest that the level of clarity regarding the nature of the boundary will change according to the type of coaching being practiced (Bachkirova, 2011; Hawkins & Smith, 2013). The less transactional the nature of the coaching, the more blurred the concept of the boundary becomes for the coach (Bachkirova, 2011; Bachkirova, 2007; Maxwell, 2009).

When trying to identify behavioural indicators of the boundary, some novices make reference to levels of emotion displayed by clients, repeated negative behaviour patterns and witnessing no change in the client after a few sessions. Again, there are discrepancies between theoretical and practice definitions. Such discrepancies might suggest that novices practice beyond the limits of their competence (Baker, 2014; Price, 2009). In short, the level of similarity and overlap between coaching and counselling approaches and techniques makes the concept of a boundary too confusing to identify, for both novices and experienced coaches alike (Baker, 2014; Price, 2009).

Defining the boundary in practice

Many of the novice coaches in the study identified the boundary in practice as a sense of discomfort. Such discomfort highlights the phenomenological nature of human experience, as individuals experience the world through their bodies (Baker, 2014; Romdenh-Romluc, 2011). The immersion in their knowledge might prevent the novice from having a more accurate perspective on their feelings of discomfort. As one novice lamented, '*I can't see the wood through the trees*'. Therefore, it could be argued that the novice is often subject to their embodied knowledge and may find it very difficult to view their perspective objectively (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

A lack of resources often results in a surge of emotions for novices and the inability to ascribe meaning to new feelings might also create anxiety, uncertainty or doubt (Baker, 2014; Jarvis, 2012). For example, one novice spoke of being so overwhelmed with anxiety that he struggled to discern other feelings. Therefore, the novice might be moved to interpret new, uncomfortable feelings as the boundary between coaching and counselling. Several novices recounted experiences that they had identified as being close to the boundary, but also mentioned uncertainty about their interpretations.

Boundary setting for many novice coaches appears to be inconsistent. Most novice-participants did not appear to set boundaries with clients very clearly, if at all. It is possible that there are three factors affecting novices' boundary management. Firstly, beliefs about the nature of coaching and the need to guard against uncomfortable feelings, propelled several to set very clear boundaries. All the novices mentioned boundary conversations, during formal contracting (Lee, 2013), at the start of engagements. However, there was little indication that their conversations involved much discussion on both sides about shared assumptions, beliefs and expectations regarding the nature of the boundary. The second factor that might influence the novice's boundary management is that some novices do not appear to state, explicitly, what the boundary is, with clients. However, a lack of clarity and confusion regarding the

nature of the boundary might make such conversations difficult. In fact, one of the novices described boundary setting as a matter of *'trial and error'*. A third factor affecting boundary setting, amongst novices, is a belief that such practice will reduce spontaneity and instinctive practice.

The findings have been presented in the form of a theoretical framework, in figure 2. The visual representation of the framework depicts the three broad categories, with the emotional current underpinning much of the novice coach's learning process.

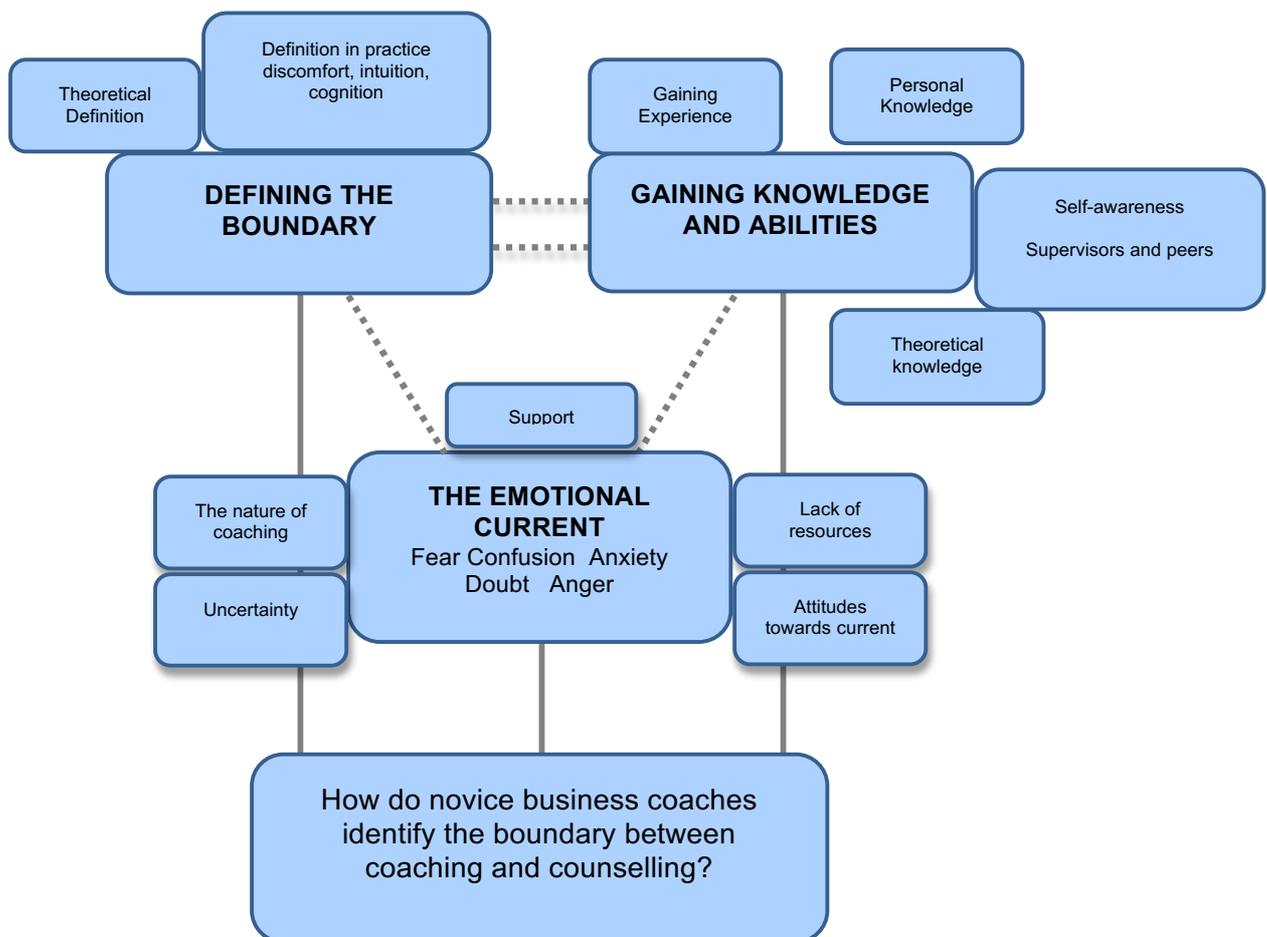


Figure 2: A visual representation of the theoretical framework

Conclusion

The ways in which novices appear to identify the boundary bear some similarities to the seemingly inconsistent identification processes of experienced coaches (Baker, 2014); Jopling, 2007; Price, 2009). However, there appears to be a high level of uncertainty for many novice coaches when identifying the area in between coaching and counselling and the emotional intensity of the novice's learning process cannot be underestimated. Findings also suggest that the more developmental, the nature of the coaching, the more likely the novice is to experience uncertainty, regarding identification of a boundary between coaching and counselling (Bachkirova, 2011).

The boundary appears to be interpreted personally, and consequently and is in keeping with the findings of previous research, conducted with both novice and experienced coaches (Baker, 2014; Price, 2009). Rather than individual interpretation representing inconsistency on the part of novice coaches (Baker, 2014), a constructivist paradigm suggests such interpretation is in keeping with the relativistic nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, Charmaz, 2014). The findings do not appear to support Baker's arguments that novice coaches might practice beyond the limits of their competence (Baker, 2014). Moreover, this study suggests that novices' levels of anxiety and concern, regarding mistakes and boundary transgression, are more likely to encourage caution in their practice. Finally, the level of similarity and overlap between coaching and counselling also suggests that the concept of a clear boundary between the two practices is unhelpful (Baker, 2014).

There appears to be a difference in attitudes towards the development of self-awareness, amongst novice coaches. Novices, for whom personal development is a mandatory part of their coach training, and separate from supervision, appear to make greater personal links between their own emotional awareness and the ability to deal with more complex issues brought by clients. The study suggests that all novice coaches might benefit from such a component in their coach training.

Limitations and areas for further research

A few novice coaches in the study appeared to be more confident than others when identifying the boundary. However, it is possible that the forty-five hours of coaching practice undertaken by one novice, as opposed to the twenty-five hours undertaken by another, might account for a more confident approach and practice.

Inconsistencies were identified regarding supervisors' areas of focus. An in-depth, longitudinal study into supervisors' practices with novice coaches might bring benefits to the providers of coach training. Such research might offer a deeper understanding of some of the areas that are currently being addressed in the supervision of novice coaches. This in turn might also help to capture aspects of best practice that can be shared throughout the coaching community.

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