



## Currents in Coaching Research Newsletter

### **The Coaching/Psychotherapy Boundary: Brick Wall or Picket Fence? (Part 2)**

A look at conflicts around the globe shows that borders are never quite as solid as they appear to be on a map. Similarly, the ideas offered in part one of this essay suggest that early maps of the coaching/psychotherapy boundary may warrant reconsideration and renegotiation.

Ten years ago, Rotenberg (2000) noted "...a growing trend among psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically trained therapists working as occupational coaches in corporate environments, industry and public organizations." (p. 653) For the past several years, the British and Australian Psychological Associations have supported a Special Interest Group in Coaching Psychology

### **In This Issue**

The Coaching/Psychotherapy  
Boundary

Researcher's Haiku

References

## **Researcher's Haiku**

**Long past its season  
this letter sneaks into  
your box  
shame-faced.**

*(Readers are invited to email their  
researcher's haiku-original or  
otherwise-for inclusion in future issues.  
Your feedback on this issue is welcome  
too!)*

## **References**

Allan, Julie (2012) Wisdom needed:  
Reward offered. International  
Coaching Psychology Review. 7(1)  
March 2012. Pp.119-121.

whose members engage in research and scholarly debate about the foundations, practices, standards and boundaries of the field.

Increasingly, the scholarly literature appears to be pointing toward a more complex and nuanced understanding of the framework for considering the intersections and distinctions of coaching and psychotherapy.

David Gray (2006) suggests an approach which integrates a psychotherapeutic model of coaching with a model of transformative adult learning as a viable alternative or complement to psychodynamics. He also notes the caveat that the coaching process "...may open up deep seated anxieties which between may be more appropriately addressed by a psychotherapeutic approach." (p.475). Gray proposes a collaboration between psychotherapist and non-psychotherapist coaches. In Gray's model, a network of coaches from various backgrounds can serve as a resource for collaborative learning and professional development through sharing and debriefing critical incidents and exchanging ideas about tools and resources, considering ethical practices and providing supervision.

The continuing ambiguity about the border between coaching and psychotherapy underpins a key theme in the on-going debates among members of the coaching psychology community and other practitioner groups in the field. As participants in a recent series of essays observed, "complexity as a theoretical and practical construct...may assist in developing an understanding of our world, our context and our practice." (Whybrow, Grant, Palmer & Kent, 2012, p.72). The authors put forward the premise of the "co-created, emergent nature of all human interaction", and acknowledge that the people we coach "make decisions, act and react in the face of multiple, competing agendas, rapidly changing circumstances and the emergence of new and unpredictable problems and issues" (p.73).

Bachkirova, Tatiana (2007) Role of coaching psychology in defining boundaries between counseling and coaching. In *Handbook of Coaching Psychology*. Stephen Palmer & Alison Whybrow (eds.) 351-366. Routledge. NY: NY

Gray, David E. (2006) Executive coaching: Toward a dynamic alliance of psychotherapy and transformative learning processes. *Management Learning*. 37(4) Dec. 2006. Pp.475-497

Kagan, Jerome. (2012) *Psychology's ghosts: The crisis in the profession and the way back*. Yale University Press: New Haven.

Maxwell, Alison (2009) How do business coaches experience the boundary between coaching and therapy/counseling? *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice* 2(2) September 2009, 149-162

Rotenberg, Carl T. (2000) Psychodynamic psychotherapy and executive coaching-Overlapping paradigms. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*. 28(4) 2000. Pp 653-663

Price, John (2009) The coaching/therapy boundary in organizational coaching. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice* 2(2) September 2009, 135-148.

Whybrow, Alison, Grant, Anthony M., Palmer, Stephen & Kemp, Travis (2012). Editorial: Coaching psychology coming of age. *International Coaching Psychology Review*. 7(1) March 2012. Pp 72-74

In a similar vein, Jerome Kagan's (2012) re-evaluation of the methods and principles of research in the social and behavioral sciences urges professionals in the field of psychology to reconsider the field's emphasis on single causal or defining factors. Kagan argues that life circumstances, values, language norms and context-driven experiences all contribute to mental states and that assessments must be made in ways that acknowledge the diversity and complexity of human behavior.

If we accept this notion, then the principle of a single, universally applicable and solid boundary between coaching and psychotherapy no longer applies. Instead, a determination emerges in the process of the coach-client interaction as to the most appropriate course of action. This may entail coaching in the strictest sense, psychotherapeutically informed coaching, referral or provision of appropriate therapy or some customized combination.

To navigate this more ambiguous territory effectively, it may be helpful for practitioners to consider two key signposts. The first of these is the coach's knowledge base, understanding of psychodynamics, clinical knowledge and the degree to which the coach's professional judgment is developed and honed. Comparing the types of coaching goals and processes and measuring these against the knowledge and skill sets of different groups of coaching practitioners, Bachkirova concludes that coaches must be aware of the limitations of their skill set and apply the skills they have appropriately with respect to psychological issues in their practice.

The second signpost addresses client characteristics and coaching goals. Respondents to Price's (2009) survey noted that clients play a "much more important role in determining what makes a coaching or therapeutic interaction than the coach/therapist" (p.140). Ideally, the client has some degree of self-awareness and the ability to

objectively reflect on the self-observation. The goals for the coaching engagement should be consistent with coaching goals: specific, measurable, outcome-oriented and future directed (Price, 2009; Maxwell, 2009).

Julie Allan (2012) highlights three key concepts which may anchor the continued exploration of this ambiguous territory: professionalism, empiricism and wisdom. Regarding the first, Allan states that a profession goes beyond knowledge of the principles and practices of a field. It is also "an issue of judgment and praxis" (p.119). Empiricism rests on on-going attention to and reflective learning from the evidence provided in practice and theory. Wisdom encompasses both empiricism and appropriateness. She cites five elements which must be present: knowledge of content, knowledge of process, understanding of life stages/contexts/relationships; knowledge about the presence of different values and priorities; and tolerance of ambiguity.

The exploration is by no means over; the boundary is dismantled and has not yet been fully redefined. The dialogue has, however, opened up a space for deepening the practice and profession of coaching in a world in which our boundaries are shifting every day.

**FRANCINE CAMPONE, Ed.D., MCC**

*Executive and Personal Coaching  
Coach Mentoring, Supervision and  
Education*

Denver, Colorado

(303)862-7710

[Visit My Website](#)

[Email Me](#)

[Subscribe To My Newsletter](#)

*Helping mature professionals reinvent life by  
reinventing work.*

[Forward email](#)



Try it FREE today.

This email was sent to deb@marketingjava.com by [francine@reinventinglife.net](mailto:francine@reinventinglife.net) | [Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

F. Campone Coaching | 1150 Vine Street | #902 | Denver | CO | 80206