

Developing Principles For Therapeutic Coaching: A UK Perspective

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Abstract

This position paper describes a proposed definition and theoretical model for therapeutic coaching and coach training, which comes from the authors' experiences and professional development. It has evolved through rigorous discussions on what it takes to coach effectively for both clients and coaches. Our experiences have highlighted a group of clients who are often supported by psychotherapeutic models and where a coaching approach can be both developmental and therapeutic.

To facilitate the therapeutic coaching process, there are generic enablers that coaches need to access, whichever coaching philosophy and models they use. These include the intra- and inter-personal skills gained through the established frameworks of Mindfulness and Presence, Emotional Intelligence and the ways in which people manage stress and build the resilience to stay well. With these skills the coach becomes highly self- and other-aware and can manage their personal thoughts and emotions without interference in the coaching process. They can therefore be fully present and effective for the client, which enhances coaching outcomes and sustainability.

Keywords: therapeutic coaching, resilience, mindfulness, presence, emotional intelligence, salutogenesis

Introduction and objectives

In this position paper we aim to:

- Define the scope and fit for a therapeutic coaching approach with service users (commissioners and clients of support services) who are not seeking traditional psychotherapeutic or counselling support

- Explore the boundaries of therapy and coaching
- Outline the three key psycho-educational frameworks of Mindfulness and Presence, Emotional Intelligence and Salutogenesis, which support the coach and client in a therapeutic approach.

A definition of therapeutic coaching

The literature is sparse in its definitions of and research into therapeutic coaching. In our discussions we have come to a proposed definition and wish to open the debate in terms of this definition and the skills and behaviours coaches need to work therapeutically.

Therapeutic coaching is a non-directive process, which provides an environment of safety, trust and empathy. This enables the client to express and accept uncertainties, anxieties and vulnerabilities and explore their own reality. The aim of therapeutic coaching is for the client to develop pertinent techniques for challenge management and recovery. Therapeutic coaching enables the client to become more aware of their emotions and resources and cultivate options and techniques for self-management, communication and resourcefulness. Therapeutic coaching builds resilience, and promotes wellbeing and capability in the midst of the challenges of disease, pathology, transition, stress and/or anxiety.

Our definition builds on related research that includes Post Traumatic Growth after Trauma and Adversity (Ramos, 2013; Joseph, 2008; Linley, 2004), Mindfulness in Coaching (Cavanagh, 2016; Cavanagh & Spence, 2013), and Coaching Philosophy (Jenkins, 2011; Grant, 2011; McCarthy, 2011; Brooks, 2011).

Our experiences of therapeutic coaching

The authors are both practicing coaches with backgrounds in working with individuals challenged with development issues regarding chronic medical conditions, mental health, transitions and/or survivorship and leading through uncertainty. We came together and pooled our knowledge through a common interest in creating positive outcomes for people experiencing survivorship issues and enhancing well-being and functioning in organisations.

Clients and evaluation

Our proposed coach development model draws on our experience of coaching in private practice, with charities, and with private and public organisations, including the NHS. We have supported clients (including patients and carers) across a range of mental health and medical challenges, including cancer, neuro-inflammation and chronic pain.

Our client base suggests that there are a significant number of people who are seeking and benefit from the emotional and psychological support in a therapeutic coaching approach.

The wide variety of individuals and organisations we have worked with have reported the benefits of our approach through quantitative and qualitative feedback measures. We believe these informal methods support the development of the principles of therapeutic coaching. In order for more formal and rigorous assessments to be made, we want to move evaluation forward using a range of outcome measures more reliant on a structured qualitative approach as opposed to the feedback models we have been using. We welcome thoughts from researchers and practitioners on potential ways to facilitate this.

Coaches and coaching

We have studied a range of coaching models, all of which may be employed in working with clients. However, in creating a sustainable coaching service from our own perspectives we have both come to the conclusion that the self-development of the coach is fundamental to the process of coaching therapeutically.

The scope of a therapeutic approach for coaching and ways to assess the learning and integration completed by the coach and the competencies developed for coaching therapeutically is emerging as an area for investigation and agreement. Coaching literature describes the importance of coach presence and the critical role of the coach as a person in the coaching process (O'Broin, 2011).

The current situation

The course of life is punctuated by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity and many people's health and well-being is compromised by:

- Life-changing medical and health diagnoses and conditions with the losses and adjustments associated with these.
- Demands at work with its focus on goals and performance resulting in stress, anxiety, poor sleep, presenteeism, absenteeism and communication challenges.
- Other stressors – financial, relationship, reduced self-esteem, resistance to change and caring for family members.

We have worked with service users and clients in these areas who have requested something different from a counselling or psychotherapeutic approach to address their new reality following significant personal medical change. This includes those seeking new support options to meet existing needs.

Clients have been assessed by vocational rehabilitation counsellor-led decision-making teams and referred to coaching as they do not require counselling and need greater support than self-help.

Therapeutic coaching and therapy

Coaching and counselling are on a continuum and both develop client skills for facilitating goal attainment and behavioural change. Though they differ significantly in their knowledge bases and professional requirements, they both use methodologies to enhance the self-identified health and well-being goals of their clients (Jordan, 2013).

At the therapeutic end of coaching, the boundary and the framework of coaching and counselling become hard to define. This boundary is important ethically, professionally and for good practice. The opportunities to negotiate this boundary, we propose, depend on the trainings, skills, experience, capacity and ways of being of the professional. It is along this boundary that, in our experience, mental health, medical and survivorship coaching take place.

Differences between coaching and therapy

One of the differentiation points between therapy and coaching is that in therapy, the level of instability, anxiety, or tension is so high as to be destructive of the person's ability to function effectively. They have slipped from the edge of chaos into chaos itself. Hence often one of the proximal

goals of therapy is to help the person reduce distress so as to enable the emergence of a new order (Jordan, 2013; Cavanagh, 2006).

However, Bader (2009) writes that the difference between coaching and therapy is greatly overstated. The BACP Position Statement on Coaching and Counselling outlines clear differences within therapy and coaching and describes the value of a coaching approach. In our experience, many clients presenting to a service to find emotional or psychological support in a survivorship context are healthy and functioning and want to develop further. This aligns with Spence's view (2006) that for this reason coaching is not therapy. Many actually request not to "go over the past" or that they have experienced psychotherapeutic interventions and are looking for different support to move on.

Recognising the ethical boundary

The boundary between coaching and psychotherapeutic support is essential for the coach to determine for their own and clients' safety and wellbeing. In our experience, we have clients who are seeking coaching to move on from therapy. Also, clients who through the process of awareness come to the realisation of deep personal issues and would benefit from a psychotherapeutic approach. The coach needs to be aware of these situations and contract with the client appropriately and signpost to other support services as appropriate.

All professional therapeutic / health coaches and counsellors and psychotherapists are required to conduct themselves according to statutes, regulations, principles, values, ethics and standards of their professions. Ethical frameworks for practice are common across coaching and psychotherapeutic professional bodies and both the authors are members of a professional coaching organisation.

Four major coaching organisations have also come together to agree a Statement of Shared Professional Values (Association for Coaching, 2008) within which Principle Six details Boundary Management. It states that "Every coach will recognise their own limitations of competence and the need to exercise boundary management. The client's right to terminate the coaching process will be respected at all times, as will the need to acknowledge different approaches to coaching which may be more effective for the client than their own" (Association for Coaching, 2008).

An example of the way in which this is implemented is in the Association for Coaching Supervision Principles Framework, which includes as Principle 1: “To do no harm, by recognising boundaries and staying within the limits of their competence” (Association for Coaching, 2013).

Our Intention: To move towards a definition of therapeutic coaching and the intra- and inter-personal development for coaches in this sector

Our proposition is that a coach approach in its own right can be therapeutic and developmental, supporting the clients to learn about themselves, acknowledge their current reality and explore options to move forward in challenging circumstances. The coaching process creates a non-judgmental and exploratory space and supports clients to manage overwhelm and the associated inhibited functioning. The therapeutic experience opens the client to feel a range of emotions that may have been kept down (Hogan, 2016, p. 494) and it is in this additional realm of emotional awareness and self-regulation that therapeutic coaching takes place.

The scope and opportunity for therapeutic coaching

Therapeutic coaching has potential value in a range of situations. These go beyond supporting clients to deal with challenges regarding physical and mental health. Emotional challenges occur in every aspect of our personal and professional lives. For example, this could be supporting older family members with medical conditions or vocational rehabilitation enabling a return to work after serious illness.

Therapeutic coaching has positive impact in and is used for the following conditions that may be single or multiple and overlay other conditions more usually experienced in coaching:

- Stress and Anxiety
- Behavioural change e.g. resistance
- Transition management, for example loss, trauma and grief associated with physical health and survivorship, organisations and life events. A framework for transition management is provided by Bridges’ Model of Transition (Bridges, 2004).

Many coaches may find themselves inadvertently working therapeutically with emotions, thoughts and feelings. In our experience it is

important to recognise one's own boundaries and develop, practice and integrate skills of self-awareness and self-regulation.

Principles for working therapeutically

In line with all coaching interventions, contracting and being clear on expectations and roles is an essential element of working therapeutically. If during this process the coach concludes the client is not functioning healthily then therapeutic coaching is not appropriate and action will be necessary to ensure client safety and effective signposting.

However, it is likely that strong emotions will be part of the on-going therapeutic coaching process and it is vital that this is conducted from a place of safety for the client, the coach and the relationship between them.

We therefore propose that the intra- and inter-personal development areas and frameworks for coaches who wish to work safely and effectively in this space include:

- Mindfulness and Presence
- Emotional Intelligence (EI)
- Salutogenic principles of Antonovsky

These enable the coach to develop the core competences for therapeutic change as described by Rogers (1992), which are:

- **Congruence:** to be a congruent, genuine, integrated person. It means that within the relationship the coach is freely and deeply himself, with his actual experience accurately represented by his awareness of himself (Rogers, 1992). We propose that congruence internally and in communication are achieved through the development, practice and mastery of mindfulness and emotional intelligence.
- **Unconditional positive regard:** This is non-judgmental acceptance of the client and the capacity to listen and communicate from a place of respect, curiosity and authenticity, all of which are enhanced by the training and practice of emotional intelligence and mindfulness.
- **Empathy:** This is needed by the coach to support clients to express and accept their reality and develop and implement change strategies. Empathy is a skill developed in both EI training and mindfulness practice. We propose (and experience ourselves) that these enhance

awareness, presence and self-regulation enabling the level of empathy required for therapeutic coaching processes.

The development frameworks for therapeutic coaching

Mindfulness

There are a variety of definitions of mindfulness (Cavanagh, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2004; Langer, 2000; Scott et al., 2004; Shapiro et al., 2006 and Bishop, 2004), the common element of which is present-moment awareness and noticing without judgment.

There is now emerging research and guidance on mindfulness and coaching (Bruce, 2010; Cavanagh, 2013; Hall, 2013; Hall, 2015). Mindfulness supports improved attunement to and understanding of ourselves as coaches, enabling us to attune more effectively with clients and support them to self-attune (Bruce, 2010) and better understand themselves (Cavanagh, 2013, p.123).

Research shows that practitioner mindfulness attitudes and behaviours influence processes associated with purposeful, positive change in the coach, the coaching relationship and for coach presence. This is achieved through training in self-regulation and inquiry, by facilitating awareness, insight, openness, empathy and compassion for self and others (Cavanagh, 2013).

Personal practice brings mindfulness into our lives through formal meditation and informal practice without judgment or attachment and with acceptance and the capacity to let go. It provides a way to hold our challenges with curiosity and compassion, rather than dwelling on or denying them, thereby encouraging a new way of relating to and coping with our experiences, minimising worry and reactivity (the flight and fight responses) and rumination (about the past). It facilitates flow and flexibility, challenging us to be open to uncertainty and not knowing, turn towards rather than turning away from difficulties and accept impermanence as a constant feature of life. Mindfulness practice provides resources for letting go of the need to control the future (including forward planning for a coaching session), to be with whatever arises keeping focus on the present and providing a springboard for wise action.

Mindfulness supports us to manage experiences and adversity, to connect to the wider nature of what it is to be human, and benefits both

individuals (coaches and clients) and the dynamic of both coaching and supervision relationships.

In a coaching relationship we make contact with the client's present experiences to build on strengths and explore challenges and develop options, leading to a commitment to move towards action. Although mindfulness is not goal orientated, a future vision of what is most important is found to enhance commitment (Kabat-Zinn, 2004 p. 45) in mindfulness training. The focus of coaching and mindfulness is both present and future and coaching enables the client to engage with establishing strategies and taking action towards their goal or vision.

The embodiment of mindfulness in relationship develops presence. Mindful presence enables deep listening, enhances tracking of the client by using oneself as an instrument to guide responses to the client (Chaskalson, 2011), noticing what is said and left unsaid and exploring uncertainty with curiosity and non-judgment. It decreases coach emotional reactivity and reduces attachment to subjective experience, which generates space to observe, step back and respond more effectively, creatively and compassionately to the client's needs in that moment.

Mindfulness skills can be shared with clients (Dunkley & Stanton, 2014) if they choose to engage with these. Clients report after a coaching programme that they benefit from a new ability to control worry and rumination and improvements in self-management, positivity and well-being.

Presence

Silsbee (2008) explains that a state of presence allows the coach to access a state of calm that brings connection for the client to a larger context, new possibilities and freedom of choice. Parsons and Mariposa (2016) suggest a simple model that enables the development of presence. The fundamental dimensions of presence include somatic awareness, clear intention and adaptability. In terms of the coaching relationship it becomes important for the coach to clearly articulate their intention with regard to the coaching relationship. This is also highlighted in the approach of Silsbee (2008) in *Presence Coaching*. When working in this way the coach connects with their own inner state, orients their purpose as a coach and the purpose for the client.

With the high levels of presence described above, clients move at a pace that is comfortable for them. This creates the space and time for thinking and developmental learning and the authors have witnessed enhanced empowerment, autonomy, and congruence in actions with the clients.

Emotional intelligence: Managing emotions in self and others

Emotional intelligence is a concept that has developed over the last 30 to 40 years. Early scientific studies in the 1970s started to understand how various conscious states are brought to behaviours (LeDoux, 1988). The systems in the brain that generate these behaviours are highly conserved across the animal kingdom and are important biological drivers of finding food, shelter, protection and reproduction. These powerful processes therefore provide an impetus to act before we can think. Emotions could therefore be viewed as a response of the individual when it is too important to think.

We all exhibit both similar and unique emotional states. The work of Paul Ekman in the 1970s demonstrated that there is a range of common facial expressions that represent universal emotions across humankind (Goleman, 2003). Different states may also reflect a range of complex feelings; for example, seven types of happiness have been described, including amusement, wonder and peacefulness (Goleman, 2003).

The term 'emotional intelligence' is a way to define an alternative view of skills and competences, as opposed to the traditional problem-solving approach (Goleman, 2009). In essence emotional intelligence is a marker of how able we are to recognise and manage emotions in ourselves and other people. This is a key feature of supporting people undergoing emotional distress during a medical challenge in survivorship and in stress, anxiety and overwhelm.

Providing an educational perspective and creating awareness around the key features of emotions can bring insight and give the client the permission they need to express their feelings and emotions in a manner that is compassionate to themselves and others.

Davidson (2012) has outlined six key elements of emotional style:

- Self-awareness – how I articulate what I'm experiencing
- Social intuition - how we read other people

- Resilience style - how we deal with setbacks
- Outlook – any positive or negative impact from our environment
- Sensitivity to the immediate context - working with what is happening now
- Attention - how we focus or how easily we can be distracted

He goes on to describe how the emotional style can impact human health from a perspective of health psychology. As emotions are linked strongly with physiological responses he argues that developing flexibility in our emotional style can actually be good for our physical health and wellbeing. This suggests that a therapeutic approach that allows clients to feel more (Hogan, 2016) will be of positive benefit.

These frameworks provide useful tools and practices by which the coach and client can develop their own self-awareness and ability to become truly present with themselves and with others.

Antonovsky's salutogenic framework for health and wellbeing

Salutogenesis is a concept that focuses on the development and promotion of positive health and well-being. It was originally described by Antonovsky (1979, 1987). The approach is based on concepts that build an inner trust that things will work out well. Key concepts are a sense of coherence in the world and the availability of some external factors termed generalised resilience resources.

These generalised resources include, for example, financial resources and knowledge and social factors that enable people to respond to challenges in their life. Their ability to associate with all these factors and to use these resources is important in developing their sense of coherence in the world.

The key elements of this process are:

- Comprehensibility – a comprehension that life can be understood
- Manageability - there are enough resources to meet the demands of life
- Meaningfulness – life makes sense and problems are worth investment

Our experience is that coaching individuals to develop a sense of coherence can support individuals to feel less fractured and more competent to manage their challenges and current situation with greater autonomy and self-compassion.

Our observation is that from a therapeutic coaching perspective, the exploration and acknowledgment of the range of thoughts, feelings and emotions an individual client is experiencing supports them build their sense of coherence. They become more capable of focusing on how to cope and see their emotional triggers and responses as part of who they are, rather than being reactive and something to contain. With a salutogenic orientation, clients are able to develop and create their own order from what may have previously been seen to be chaos, and to create an orientation towards a goal or goals.

Creating a defined contract with the client to explore and investigate these areas of comprehension, meaning and managing their resources supports a positive health approach and the development of sustainable well-being, which is an important focus for clients, particularly in the face of adversity and challenge.

What does this mean for the coach?

The common and complementary aspects of E.I., mindfulness and presence provide a framework by which the coach and client can develop their own self-awareness and ability to become truly present with themselves and with others.

Having a mindful presence based in practice is an essential component of developing flexibility in emotional style. Taking time to reflect on one's own feelings and emotions, becoming more aware of how you experience your bodily sensations and the physiological drivers of behavioural response brings an ability to pause. This creates an opportunity to recognise and articulate your world.

The more the coach can investigate and explore the nature of different physiological or bodily responses the more the coach can build a stronger emotional vocabulary and recognise emotions in themselves and others.

Through research and our personal experience, we have found that these frameworks support a coach in five arenas:

Preparing for coaching

In developing present moment awareness, mindfulness enables us to manage, decentre and regulate our personal internal processes; for example, through focusing on the breath, to be calm and focused for our clients.

Coaching

With a mindful approach, the coach brings their whole and authentic self into the relationship with and for the client. It provides ways for coaches to track their personal emotional responses and therefore provides a calmer and more open space for the client to be heard without ‘interference’ from the personal mental processes of coach. Embodying the ‘mindfulness attitudinal foundations’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2004) supports attention direction and removes the need to attain particular personal goals or be thinking ahead and planning. It trains us to be with what is happening for the client in the moment and fosters the environment of client as expert, being with what arises and the evolution of their action plan.

The ‘positive effect’ pathway proposed by Cavanagh (2013, p. 120) highlights personal outcomes of better goal attainment and improvements in wellbeing, resilience, relationships and engagement. It also reduces stress and anxiety. Our experience is that mindfulness training and practice increases the levels of coach congruence, receptivity, flexibility and flow.

Post-coaching reflection and supervision

Mindfulness supports the coach to maintain a non-judgmental, curious and self-compassionate way to approach feedback, evaluation and reflective practice both personally and with their supervisor.

Building empathy

How individuals relate to others is an essential part of the social dynamics of how we have evolved and developed. Humans are social animals that have hard-wired, subconscious emotional responses to the environment (Le Doux, 1988; Goleman, 2003; Goleman, 2009). The recent finding of single cell and system mirroring in motor responses of non-human primates leads to the possibility that this type of mechanism may be one way of how we relate to each other. It is possible that these forms of imitation not only

operate on cognitive and social constructs but also in terms of emotional contagion (the ability to transfer emotions between individuals).

The ability of a coach to engage in and express empathy will be a reflection of the ability to feel or imitate the clients' experiences and emotions without being overwhelmed by them. Sympathy is an understanding of the suffering of another. These differing relational qualities can have a dramatic impact on our response to witnessing distress or strong emotion in others. "Poor you" is a response from a perspective of sympathy whereas an empathetic response could be "How do you feel about ...?" or "I sense the feeling of...".

Working with people therapeutically requires the coach to be highly adept at and agile in emotional management to recognise and articulate emotion and feelings in the moment within the coaching relationship. Emotional agility is recognised also as a key feature for leadership in fast-paced business environments (David & Congleton, 2013) and as clients learn relational behaviours from coaches within the coaching process this can be a valuable learning tool for clients in executive roles.

Promoting a healthy perspective and reducing vicarious trauma, stress and anxiety in the coach

Anotonovskiy's salutogenic framework helps the coach build their own sense of coherence, comprehensibility and meaningfulness in their life. In our experience, this framework can support the building of strong boundaries in therapeutic coaching. The salutogenic approach maintains distance and reduces the impact of vicarious trauma. This sense of coherence offers a stabilisation, which then features in the coaching dyad, supporting a safe place of exploration.

In addition, this process creates for the coach an opportunity for self-reflection and awareness of what resources are required to maintain a healthy, balanced and sustainable personal and professional life.

What does this mean for the client?

Coaching therapeutically with clients experiencing emotional issues regarding their survivorship and/or mental health journey means the coach has to be in the moment, empathetic, managing their thoughts and emotions and creating presence. This is, in our experience, a place of enablement for

the client. To have a coach that can tune into the story and metaphor or themes of the client's present experience and explore these empathetically can unveil a language and meaning behind their emotion and the transitional states they are experiencing.

The ability of the coach to hold an empathetic space creates safety and time for objective non-judgmental unravelling of thoughts, feelings and attitudes. A sympathetic space on the other hand leads to agreement or disagreement on the nature of the feeling, emotion or attitude, and by definition brings the coach's story into the relationship.

When the coach maintains mindfulness and presence, the client can often come to imitate this place of safety and inner calm. In our experience, this act of witnessing, coupled with appropriate tools, techniques and practices, is a way in which the client can build their own resources and develop ways and strategies to find emotional self-management.

Coaching is a non-directive partnership. A strong sense of coherence in the coach in the midst of trauma, stress and anxiety within the client, supports them becoming clearer on their own process. The space for the client to explore and become aware of and accept the new reality they face can be truly enlightening and therapeutic. This enables clients to develop their own sense of coherence.

Incorporating these principles in research assessments and practice

Our suggestion is that to assess the impact of a therapeutic coaching approach, a key determinant will be the skills of the coach.

The ability of a coach to be present, mindfully and emotionally aware, self-regulating and to be experienced by the client as congruent and with a sense of coherence will impact on the outcomes of coaching. These developmental and behavioural skills of the coach are suggested as assessments of coaching impact, ideally with standardised assessment in each of these areas. This may be a challenge given the range of validated measures of mindfulness and emotional intelligence available to the research community.

Conclusions

The framework we propose for coaches working with survivorship through health transitions, medical and mental health challenges and chronic health conditions is informed by their training in key areas of mindfulness and presence, emotional intelligence and salutogenic principles. These rigorous, well-researched frameworks and practices enable the coach to increase their level of self-regulation, presence and self-efficacy, which facilitates the development of an empathetic space in which clients can explore their vulnerabilities and fears and initiate new resilient and self-supporting behaviours. These three key areas and their applications in coaching provide a process for the coach to build skills and capabilities to coach therapeutically and enhance well-being in their own lives.

An objective in this paper was to define the scope of the boundary between therapy and coaching. In many aspects, this is defined by the contract the coach and client will establish. Our proposition is that working therapeutically, the coach supports the client developmentally with regard to expressing their feelings and how they can become adept at creating space for the client to negotiate the stages of transition and move on effectively.

Therapeutic coaching is not the answer for all clients; however, we propose that this approach has value and potential. In our experience, there are National Health Service users that align naturally with a coaching orientation when this is on offer.

The skills and experience gained through training in a therapeutic approach to coaching enables executive coaches to navigate clients' lives comprehensively, particularly when they are affected by loss and stress.

The therapeutic coaching process supports clients in all contexts to create meaning and comprehension of the different world in which they find themselves, to manage the loss of the life they thought they would have, dreamed of or aspired to and create personal strategies to live and thrive with their current reality.

For clients who engage in the process it is an approach that, in our opinion, from their feedback, is highly effective and would benefit from further research and development.

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