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The Future of Coaching as a Profession

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The popularity of coaching is seen in an array of international coaching conferences, burgeoning coach training and education, and emergent professional bodies for coach practitioners. This escalating demand has motivated coach practitioners, consumers and educators of coaching to advocate the professionalization of the industry to ensure the quality of coaching services.

Coaching as a form of practice is now widely adopted, although recognition as a profession remains contentious and patchy, with different jurisdictions taking contrary views on its legitimacy. A growing awareness of the potential benefits to the industry of professional status has led to participation in international dialogues, such the Global Convention on Coaching (GCC) and the International Coaching Research Forum (ICRF). These dialogues have in turn helped to motivate initiatives on the definition of standards for coaching by various organizations including the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC), and a working group of Australian stakeholder organizations coordinated by Standards Australia. In 2012 an alliance of three organizations, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and the Association of Coaching (AC), was formed and they opened an invitation for others to join.

This chapter outlines the criteria for a discipline to be accepted as a profession, briefly assessing the extent to which coaching complies. Potential lessons for coaching from the development of psychotherapy into a profession are then summarized, highlighting the fragility of the term 'profession' in contemporary society. The chapter goes on to outline key observations on professionalization, as distinct from 'professionalism'. Feasible options regarding the status of

coaching as a true profession, or alternatively as an occupation maintaining professionalism are compared, and ongoing concerns and challenges are underlined.

Criteria for a profession

Generally accepted core features of a profession include the requirement for members to have formal academic qualifications; adherence to an enforceable code of ethics; practice licensed only to qualified members; compliance with applicable state-sanctioned regulation; and a common body of knowledge and skills (Spence, 2007: 261). This is a highly contentious area and there are many ways of viewing a profession.

From a legalistic perspective, a profession is established if some of the following criteria are embodied in a law or similar statutes (DBVC, 2007):

- societal mandate (monopoly for professional practice)
- formalized curriculum/professional education
- plurality of theory and methods as the basis for the curriculum
- research foundation in relation to the professional practice
- governmental accreditation, professional licence
- quality assurance
- reflective professional competence
- standards of ethics
- specific career paths, professional trajectories and passages
- professional body – association with formalized rights and duties for their members
- financial independence of the single professional (employment, scale of fees).

Bennett (2006: 241–2) has reviewed the relevant literature and summarized the criteria to enable coaching to be determined a profession as follows:

1. Identifiable and distinct skills – i.e. skills that are widely accepted as required for the performance of skilled coaching.
2. Education and training required to acquire proficiency – for example, the minimum initial and ongoing training required to coach; generally accepted competences required for coaches; means of assessing competence.
3. Recognition outside the community as a profession – for example, recognition by established professions as a profession; government classification of coaching as a profession.
4. Code of ethics – a code of ethics for coaches defined, implemented, monitored and effectively enforced by a governing body, making coaching a self-disciplined industry.
5. Public service – public service by coaches that is motivated by altruism rather than financial gain.
6. Formalized organization – widely accepted and established professional association(s) representing the profession and those practising coaching.
7. Evaluation of merit (credentialling) and self-regulation of service – for example, definition of accepted requirements for coaches; systems for assessing competence; systems for monitoring and regulating service delivery by coaches; mechanisms for encouraging thought and discussion about the practice of coaching.
8. Established community of practitioners – for example, forums where coaches can network and exchange ideas on coaching; publications supporting the community of practitioners.
9. Status of membership in a profession – for example, recognition of coaches by their clients and the general public as members of a profession.

10. Public recognition – recognition by the general public that coaching is a distinct and established profession.
11. Knowledge base – coaching practice founded in theoretical and factual research and knowledge, with a defined body of knowledge, a defined theoretical foundation and ongoing evidence-based theoretical and practical research.

However, there is a long way to go before coaching can be defined as a profession in the narrowest sense. In the list of the criteria above none of these is fully realized in the professional field of coaching, either nationally or internationally. Bennett (2006: 242) highlighted the following critical gaps between the criteria listed above for a profession and the current practice of coaching.

- There are currently no generally accepted, identifiable and distinct skills for coaches.
- Training and/or education are not required before a person can practise as a coach, although various coach training programmes are available.
- The general public and related professions do not recognize coaching as a profession.
- There is not an established community of practitioners; for example, less than half the estimated coaches in the world belong to representative bodies such as the International Coach Federation (ICF).
- There is a lack of defined theory on which coaches base their practice.

Lessons from psychotherapy

In some ways the current position and disputes about status in the field of coaching mirror those around parallel fields such as psychotherapy. Indeed, the position of psychotherapy is illustrative of the type of problems coaching may face unless it adopts a strongly collaborative approach.

Various schools of psychotherapy have developed with their own philosophy, model of causation and intervention. Candidates were trained within one modality (i.e. specialty) and as standards developed each modality claimed its own standards body. Splits between members within single bodies led to even more forms of ‘accreditation’ and as new methods emerged additional accreditation bodies were formed. This is in contrast to physical medicine where the invention of a new treatment did not lead to multiple accrediting bodies with a single theory as the basis for registration and licence to practise. Practitioners are regulated as medics first and second by their specialism rather than their theories about human illness. In psychotherapy (and perhaps in coaching) any new theory, whether evidence-based or not, could gain adherents, thus creating new accrediting bodies.

As psychotherapy sought to gain ‘respectability’ in the form of statutory regulation, the problem was compounded by disputes between professional bodies as to which one represented the appropriate truth. Since the basis for practice was either theory and competences that had not been agreed, or an agreed knowledge base shared across all practitioners, it was difficult for statutory authorities to regulate. A ‘Psychotherapy Regulation Act’ could require 450 different models of practice to be listed, each with differing standards to cover the range of current practice. No jurisdiction would contemplate such complex legislation.

Eventually, attempts by the various groups to collaborate resulted in agreement to at least the hours of training and some common areas of knowledge (e.g. through the United Kingdom

Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)). This has only been partly successful, with ongoing disputes between the members of these collaborative bodies and with members leaving, rejoining, leaving again and others forming their own new competitive collaboration. In Europe this confusion has led to some countries restricting practice to medical practitioners and psychologists, as a sub-function within those professions, thereby denying psychotherapy as a separate profession. In others psychotherapy can be practised but only in a limited number of modalities. Forms of practice common (in the unregulated profession) in the UK would not be allowed in Germany or Spain. In the UK, the government is currently considering the regulation of psychotherapy and is also going down the restricted modality route with cognitive-behavioural, analytic, humanist and systems models being the preferred routes. The alternative favoured by the European Federation of Psychologists Associations (EFPA, www.efpa.eu) is to determine the guiding principles for practice (as for all other professions) rather than to treat psychotherapy as a practice of limited modalities.

In some countries where regulation has been attempted these issues have emerged and consequently some jurisdictions have restricted the rights to practise to a limited number of modalities or specific types of psychotherapy practice. Germany, for example, recognizes three modalities, whereas others have yet to regulate the psychotherapy profession at all. In the UK, there are multiple competing bodies which exist without a statutory framework although the authorities are currently considering regulation within four modalities. Thus a form of practice accepted in the UK (existential psychotherapy which has its own accrediting society) is not a permissible modality in Germany. In the USA, the position varies from state to state; what is included within the field also varies widely. This leads to considerable confusion about what is in and what is out, and has led to debates in some countries about how wide the field should be.

While psychotherapists worldwide fight among themselves about what is the best form of practice, others in the better established professions of psychiatry (which is state-regulated in most jurisdictions) and psychology (which is regulated in many) claim ownership of the field. Some influential voices in these fields fully deny that coaching is a separate profession and claim that it is an area of practice for their speciality rather than a separate field in its own right. As psychotherapists find themselves in territorial disputes with psychologists and psychiatrists they are also seeking to embrace the newer emerging fields, such as coaching, as their territory, arguing that coaching is a field that requires practice by a psychotherapist (Berglas, 2002).

The question is whether we wish to use this model for coaching. Even though it is acknowledged by the Global Coaching Community (GCC) that coaching is a unique synthesis of a range of disciplines (GCC, 2008: 5), attempts within coaching to seek professional standing have been hampered by its lack of conformity to the precedented basis for granting a right to be a profession. Given that each of the professional bodies within the coaching field take a different view of the criteria for professional status, gaining agreement as to what constitutes the 'profession' of coaching is difficult. Although different from psychotherapy, professional bodies in the coaching field are not accrediting bodies in themselves; they simply provide guidelines for 'professional' practice. Unless coaching can agree on the core principles (as, for example, in the EFPA model) then the negative effects of the regulation in psychotherapy may

apply: either coaching is excluded from practice as in some European countries, or state regulators will determine which forms of practice are allowed or not, thereby excluding many practitioners.

Fragility of the term 'profession' in late modern society

During the last few decades, the concept of the profession has itself become fragile. The main reason for this process of disintegration is that professionals have been losing their monopoly of knowledge. This loss, in fact, is one of the fundamental reasons for the rapid development of the coaching industry: knowledge has become something that evolves in specific communities of practice. Knowledge is not a list of facts that is stable, but it is contextualized and relational – that is, it depends upon how and where it is being used and by whom. Furthermore, knowledge is democratized by being accessible through channels open to everybody, mainly through the internet. In that sense there is no profession that has exclusive ownership over the knowledge base in specific areas of expertise. Even within traditional fields such as medicine there is growing competition from alternative practitioners such as herbalists and homeopaths. The development in recent decades has shown that traditional professions, because of fast and diversified knowledge production and dissemination, no longer enjoy automatic respect from clients based on their superior access to information.

Consequently, it is crucial to think about an alternative understanding of the concept of profession. Drake (2007), for example, has argued that we have moved beyond the traditional profession towards a craftsperson's view of professional practice, blending science and art in what he terms the 'pursuit of conscious mastery'. This has clear implications for the professionalism of coaching. Drake (2009) has argued further that coaches need to move beyond their biases for their specialized, professional knowledge to make sufficient room for other forms of knowledge and toward an engagement in a mutual and co-creative process to formulate what is happening in the coaching conversation. Others have pointed to the client becoming their own 'self-coach'. Corrie (2009) provides a framework for the coach to share tools with the client.

It seems to be challenging and unhelpful to attempt a degree of conformance in the coaching field where coaching is established as a traditional profession, since:

- Coaching is not based on societal mandate or a monopoly for professional practice.
- Coaching is not subject to governmental accreditation or a professional license.
- Coaching has no quality assurance.
- Coaching has only voluntarily accepted standards of ethics.
- Coaching has no specific career paths, professional trajectories and passages.
- Coaching has no association with formalized rights and duties for their members.
- Coaching does not guarantee financial independence for the single professional (employment, scale of fees).

However, that does not prevent coaches working towards interdisciplinary co-operation, towards a multidisciplinary professional or alternative perspective, towards agreeing key elements that might enhance the quality of the coaching offering to clients.

Traditional and alternative perspectives

Issues similar to those that have formed part of debates in other professions are emerging (Lane & Corrie, 2006). Some strongly support the view that coaching should conform to the traditional view of a profession. However, an alternative view states that professions should be recognized as institutionalized forms of power and that adopting the traditional approach could be detrimental to the future of coaching. In the literature on the sociology of the professions there are significant critiques of professions (see, for example, Larson, 1977; Johnson, 1995; Lo, 2004). These views are similar to those discussed by Lane and Corrie (2006), who argue that the knowledge to which professionals lay claim is arrived at and sustained through relationships with the state and the marketplace. Professions in general can also be seen as interest groups engaged in a collective mobility project to improve their economic and social standing. Power is gained through the attainment of professional autonomy by state licensing, which enables monopoly supply. This means that those who can most closely align themselves with power in the marketplace (for example, through gaining acceptance for their form of practice from health insurers or corporates), or align with the interests of the state (in the form of practice in public institutions), seek to dominate supply and exclude others – thus collaboration is only favoured by those with power to award contracts to supply.

The integration of the interests of coaching and the market or the state could result in the prioritizing of certain forms of knowledge over others. The market may favour short-term, cost-effective interventions which might demonstrate value to the client, but primarily to the fee-paying manager. In this scenario, the state will also favour approaches that are legitimized by evidence-based practice. There are those who see this route as detrimental to the interests of both clients and coaching as a profession.

It could be argued that the practice of some specific types of coaching is divisive, because of the ways in which priority is given to certain forms of knowledge over others, asserting that these represent the ‘truth’. These separate approaches create regimes that lead to forms of knowledge, competences and values that are impervious to other ideas and create isolation between different practitioners in the field. Thus coaches come to work, think and act within narrow areas of practice set by others because they have internalized what Foucault (1983) would call ‘regimes of truth’. There can be seen in the behaviour of some organizations an attempt to dominate based on a limited set of ideas rather than an attempt to enrich the field through collaboration.

The Global Convention on Coaching

The Global Convention on Coaching (GCC), subsequently renamed the Global Coaching Community, was established in 2007 with the explicit aim of promoting consultation and exploration of areas such as the professionalization of coaching. Ten working groups were formed by the GCC to develop white papers on key aspects of the possible future of coaching worldwide. These white papers were presented and debated at a GCC Convention held in

Dublin on 7–11 July 2008. The result was the Dublin Declaration on Coaching (GCC, 2008), which recommended:

1. the establishment of a common understanding of the profession through creation of a shared core code of ethics, standards of practice, and educational guidelines;
2. acknowledgement and affirmation of the multi-disciplinary roots and nature of coaching as a unique synthesis of a range of disciplines that creates a new and distinctive value to individuals, organisations and society;
3. using coaching to respond to a world beset by challenges with no predetermined answers by using coaching to create a space wherein new solutions can emerge; and
4. moving beyond self-interest to address the critical issues identified by the 10 working groups in an ongoing dialogue. (GCC, 2008: 5)

Significantly, a number of those consulted throughout the GCC process want to draw upon a much wider range of evidence to inform coaching practice than has traditionally been the case. In doing so they are contesting the power that professional coaching bodies are seeking. They argue that many forms of evidence should inform the work of coaches including more implicit or ‘intuitive’ knowledge, as well as greater creativity in our practice.

Another group want to emphasize relationships with clients as the primary basis on which coaches should think about their identity as a profession. While they accept the claim that our solutions to human problems are grounded in evidence, they want to recognize that we have to understand how they are shaped through social networks. Lane and Corrie (2006) have looked at how such networks operate, and argue that an expert cannot exist without a lay public recognizing and engaging the badge of expertise. The lay public is expert in other ways to which we have often failed to give sufficient credence and this, they argue, has limited professional understanding. For example, by failing to legitimize clients’ stories (or rather, by requiring clients to conform to our way of telling them), we have come to favour technical solutions that do not challenge those in authority. In so doing, we are not recognizing how we might become part of the problem, rather than the solution. We fix problems defined by those in power rather than really hear the voice of the client (see Corrie & Lane, 2009 for a more detailed account of the use of the client’s voice). Also, the coach becomes a part of the organizational system and unable to see the real issues as defined by the client. The use of fixed-agenda coaching determined by a sponsor following a 360° feedback process is an example of this problem-fixing approach (Jarvis, Lane, & Fillery-Travis, 2006).

A further example of this hegemony is the way in which the client, in some approaches to coaching, is asked to provide data in the format required by the client’s coaching process or methodology. This situation is evidenced by the number of textbooks in the field which point to a step-by-step process in which the client is asked questions in a specific order and maybe even in a specific way – the assumption of the ‘miracle coaching question’ being a case in point.

Many practitioners working in diverse and complex settings have adopted a more broadly-based definition of coaching and argue that this should lead us into a reconceptualization of what it means at the current time to embrace a ‘coaching’ identity. The members of the working and consultation groups and those present at the GCC in Dublin raised many different questions. It

was generally felt that the recommendations of the Dublin process were focused and action-oriented; the entire process identified five key areas for immediate attention: research, ethics, coach education and development, standards of competence and supervision.

Profession or occupation?

Common concerns of GCC participants around the professional status of coaching focused on whether it should become a profession or remain an occupation. Not all coaching is facilitated by a ‘professional coach’; the ‘coach’ might be engaged in another profession, e.g. a teacher coaching his colleague, a nurse coaching a trainee, or a line manager coaching another manager or employee. Coaching in this context is part of continuous professional development, where everybody in an organization or company can potentially be coach or coachee, and where employees acquire coaching competencies through specific coaching training programmes (see Law, Ireland, & Hussain, 2007). Thus coaching might be seen as a dialogical tool for continuous professional development rather than as a professional area of practice.

So, although coaching draws on multiple disciplines and is used by many types of people in many environments, it is not necessarily the case that everyone in the coaching community wants to see the creation of a profession. An occupation can be defined as (1) an activity that serves as one’s regular source of livelihood; a vocation; or (2) the principal activity in your life that one practises to earn money. To have an occupation does not – by its definition – require a special education to be able to handle the vocational tasks at hand.

On the other hand, if a profession is deemed desirable it means that a number of specific criteria such as those outlined by Bennett (2006) have to be fulfilled. It might be necessary to go further and consider the narrower position of state-regulated professions, as defined by DBVC (2007), if coaches really want to legitimize their practice. This is probably a step too far for coaching, but voluntary agreements exist currently for many bodies in the field. They share some minimal commitment to standards covering:

- voluntary commitment to possible professional standards and code of ethics
- vocational training in coaching (competence- or skills-based, rather than based on an agreed knowledge base)
- voluntary organizations making some minimal degree of commitment to safeguarding the interests of the field, including coaches and clients.

Individually, many of the nascent professional bodies in the field go beyond this.

Professionalism rather than a profession

It might be a long and, in the traditional sense, possibly a never-ending path to establish the coaching profession. It might be more fruitful to make explicit that coaching has some of its roots in different disciplines and professions (for example, HR management, psychology, organizational systems, social work, education, counselling); but that coaching expertise is further enhanced by vocational training and further education in the field of coaching – enterprises

led by institutions of higher education, coach training bodies and in-house courses that can ensure that the training received is based on research and on a high degree of theoretical and empirical evidence. The existing bodies in the field which have made commitments to research-led models (WABC in the USA and the EMCC in the UK/Europe among others) also represent part of that drive towards professionalism.

In respect of professionalism, the Dublin meeting of the GCC concluded as follows.

- a. Coaching is an emerging profession.
- b. Coaching draws on multiple disciplines, which in combination create its own knowledge base and professional practice. The multiple disciplines and knowledge bases include learning theories, adult development, behavioural/social sciences, leadership and management sciences, communication techniques.
- c. Coaching in its broadest form is also a process or technique increasingly used by different types of people in many environments and may not always be formally recognized as such.
- d. The quality of the coaching engagement is dependent on the standard, consistency and rigour of the education, development, ethics and core competencies of the emerging profession.

As such a number of questions emerge.

- a. As things stand, there are no barriers to entry; anyone can call themselves a coach and there is a community which likes that freedom.
- b. The integration of 'coaching' into the wider community, particularly as a style of communication, does not mean that everyone is a 'professional' coach.
- c. Will other professions and associations see a coaching profession as a threat?
- d. Do all parts of the coaching community want to see the creation of a coaching profession?
- e. Will the politics of the coaching community get in the way of creating a profession?

The ICRF and research on coaching

The ICRF has worked to promote the value of research, critical self-reflective practice and the development of a coaching knowledge base. As part of this process, a group of internationally recognized researchers, coach practitioners and other coaching stakeholders gathered in September 2008 at Harvard University to foster progress and community in coaching research. These ICRF 'thought leaders' developed a set of 100 research proposals which could be accessed by stakeholders worldwide, with the aim of prompting new coaching studies among researchers and graduate students to advance coaching as an evidence-based discipline (Kauffman, Russell, & Bush, 2008).

While there have been other calls for further research in coaching, the ICRF proposals serve as a particularly interesting reference point as they were generated through a multi-disciplinary forum of experts in coaching representing many regions, disciplines, roles and perspectives. A recent review of progress in research on the major focus areas covered by the ICRF proposals has highlighted the impressive volume and scope of coaching research being undertaken around the world. A survey of primary, evidence-based research into best-practice coaching published in English-language, peer-reviewed journals during the period January 2008 to June 2012 found no less than 263 relevant articles, in more than 80 journals covering a wide range of fields including coaching, coaching psychology, other psychology, medicine, business and management, human

resources, and education and training. The focus areas most commonly addressed were coaching processes (88 articles) and coaching outcomes (46 articles), with fewer studies focusing on coach education and training (12 articles) and issues related to the professional development of coaching as a discipline (12 articles) (Stern & Stout-Rostron, 2013).

Should practitioners do research?

The concept of primary, evidence-based research into best-practice coaching has been a key feature of the debate for coaching to be an evidence-based discipline (Cavanagh & Grant, 2006). This raises the question of the role of coaches as scientist practitioners. While coaching as reflective practice has been well accepted and the need for evidence-based practice is also largely accepted is it incumbent on practitioners to contribute to the profession through research from practice? The concept of practitioners as scientists has its origins in clinical psychology but has since extended to all areas of professional psychology practice. Yet it has been argued that while this is an ideal it is rarely achieved in practice with practitioners contributing very little to the literature in published refereed journals (Lane & Corrie, 2006). However, if a broader view of contribution is adopted to include publication in a wider range of sources, contributions to quality reviews and to work-based projects, then it is clear, as Lane and Corrie (2006) argue, that the scientist-practitioner model has more merit. Woolfe (2012) has also made the point in relation to counselling psychology that it is this broader view of the scientist-practitioner that should be adopted. It certainly fits coaching more adequately. Seen from this broader perspective there are ways in which coaches at all levels can contribute to the development of the profession.

WABC Professional Standards Task Force

- During 2009–2011 the WABC led an initiative to develop international professional standards for business coaching. The purpose was to outline a well-researched, relevant set of principles that inform the 'real world' practice of business coaching. The standards are intended to:
 - Define the essence of business coaching practice.
 - Educate clients, peers and the public about what business coaches do.
 - Help clients understand what they can expect from business coaches.
 - Distinguish business coaching from other types of coaching.

WABC has engaged in research for these core standards and principles, covering the definition of business coaching, business coaching competences, a proposed code of ethics and programmes for credentialing members and accrediting training providers. As a result, the WABC Professional Standards Task Force has:

- Formulated a definition of business coaching and an internationally agreed set of competences for business coaching.
- Created rigorous membership standards for the WABC.
- Developed a code of 'business ethics' and integrity for business coaches.

- Developed an international certification programme.
- Provided an international accreditation programme for business coaching training providers.
- Established ongoing research into business coaching.

Australian standards on coaching in organizations

In Australia, a united effort during 2009–2011 by no less than 26 bodies participating in a Coaching Guideline Working Group has produced a comprehensive draft handbook on coaching standards. Key stakeholder organizations involved in the Working Group include coaches, coaching agencies, buyers of coaching, coach training organizations, universities and government bodies. The project was a completely independent initiative, rather than an attempt by government to impose regulations, prompted by a call from the Australian marketplace for increased clarity and standards of practice by the coaching industry. The Working Group was coordinated by the HR & Employment Committee of Standards Australia, an independent non-profit organization recognized by the Australian government.

The standards are intended to identify key issues to be aware of when purchasing, delivering and administering coaching services, including the education and business development of coaches. The draft handbook covers (Standards Australia, 2011):

- key coaching terms and definitions
- the current context of coaching in organizations
- guidelines for coaching services (including relationships, contracting, confidentiality, standards of practice, supervision and roles)
- types of coaching and coaching competences for each type
- training guidelines
- ethical standards
- purchasing and management of coaching engagements.

Concerns and questions

A variety of questions and concerns have arisen throughout the GCC process that require shared dialogue, research, recommendations and action to be taken. If coaching is to emerge as a discipline with a professional future, a wide variety of difficult conversations need to take place in such forums as the GCC and other professional body events, where stakeholders can share their expertise and work collaboratively.

It has been recommended as a result of the GCC process that we need empirical evidence that coaching can make a difference on an individual, organizational and societal level. There still remains a lack of clarity and consensus as to what is professional coaching, what makes for an effective and reputable coach, whether coaching should in effect become a profession and if coaching works (Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006). Globally, research needs to be conducted to determine what competences are necessary for the education and development of coaches worldwide, and what will be a definition of coaching that the global community will accept. Clearly, academic researchers and coach practitioners are addressing these issues in evidence-based

research, although such studies are still focused predominantly on processes and outcomes of coaching rather than the professionalization of the discipline per se (Stern & Stout-Rostron, 2013).

One substantial concern is whether the international coaching bodies are committed to working together, and in collaboration with coach education and development organizations, and with other coaching stakeholders to define and regulate the profession. Thinking about Germany, where coaching is a major industry, but where there are more than two dozen associations that include coaching and comparable activities (like consulting, mentoring, supervision) in their association name, there seems to be a long way ahead before we have one powerful and united voice for the profession of coaching (Frank Bresser, 2009). Other concerns relate to the role of supervision in the education and development of coaches; the distinctions between the curricula across different levels of coach education and practice; and whether a universal ethical code can be developed with the various professional bodies being willing to adapt a code that reaches across borders.

It is important that there is some kind of synthesis between the professional coaching bodies, the educational institutions developing academic and practitioner programmes, and the organizations who are currently buying coaching interventions. In seeking to clarify what is coaching, and what role practitioners, academics and all stakeholders have to play, the dialogue has begun. The progress made in initiatives such as the WABC Professional Standards Task Force and the Coaching Guidelines Working Group in Australia are encouraging indications of what can be achieved by stakeholders collaborating together around the world. The new EMCC/ICF/AC alliance may provide a format to further elaborate this debate.

There are serious issues of power and diversity which may impact on how and which initiatives are taken forward. What are the issues of power that we need to address in order to be willing to listen to each other and how can we use the dialogue process to do so? The successful professional development of coaching is going to take commitment, perseverance and a willingness to let go of power, control, ego and territoriality. Although we live and work in a diverse world, we still mistrust differences. In the coaching community, there is the beginning of dialogue, events and collaboration to understand the status of coaching within each country and culture and an understanding that our common needs are similar. It is only through a continuation of concerted dialogue that we can begin to shift the status quo and move coaching towards becoming a more rigorous field.

We are still a fair distance from becoming a profession. The current status of coaching is reliant on self-regulation through various professional bodies such as the ICF, EMCC, WABC, AC and Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA). Self-regulation is supported by their underlying principles and values, voluntary codes of ethics, recommended standards of competence, complaints procedures and other guidelines. Despite these recommended guidelines, most practitioners do not, for example, carry liability insurance as do such other professions as medicine and psychology. In this regard, it is important to remember that the Dublin Declaration on Coaching recommends 'regulating ourselves' before someone else does: 'In the absence of us defining ourselves the market will do it for us' (GCC, 2008: 9).

EVALUATION

While we take the view that it is an appropriate aim to strive for more professionalism in the field of coaching, we should be aware of a number of obstacles or conditions that hinder the establishment of coaching as a profession in the traditional sense. We would argue that it might not even be in the best interests of coaching or its clients to pursue the traditional route to legitimization. The concept of a ‘profession’ is under attack and it may be that coach practitioners need to think about different forms of association, perhaps along the following lines:

1. Coaching is a beneficial and useful enterprise as part of other professions.
2. The concept of profession has changed. In that sense, it might not even be realistic to establish coaching as a profession in a traditional sense.
3. The professionalism of coaches can be developed through interdisciplinary efforts based on research and evidence-based practice.
4. To be able to work professionally as a coach means to be aware of specific antinomies and tensions in the coaching process.
5. Voluntary bodies in collaboration can begin to define new models of association that sit outside of traditional professions which retain their virtues but avoid their vices.

FURTHER READING

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What should be the benefits of the professionalization of coaching to clients of coaching services?
- Should coaching, as an emerging professional discipline, be regulated by nationally-based professional associations, or by an overarching, international body?
- How important are the distinctions between coaching services delivered by coaching psychologists and coaching services delivered by non-psychologist coaches to the definition and professionalization of coaching?

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