A bridge over troubled water
bringing together coaching and counselling

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Abstract
This article addresses the issue of forced estrangement between coaching and counselling. The separation between the two fields is explored and the consequences of this for coaching in particular as a newly established profession are discussed. It will be suggested that the source of differences and similarities between various types of ‘helping-by-talking’ lies in the dynamics of the relationship between the initial motivation of the client and the ultimate goals of the helping process. Finally we are proposing a model of coaching which takes account of the theories of counselling.

Introduction
The growth, globally, of coaching as a ‘helping by talking’ phenomenon is now well documented. A recent Harvard Business School review article, for example, estimates that there were 2,000 executive coaches in the US in 1996, a figure that had grown to 10,000 by October 2002 and could reach 50,000 by 2007 (Berglas, 2002).

Coaching is frequently distinguished from counselling by claims that counselling is a remedial activity, working on problems in the client’s personal or working life (Carroll, 2003). Parsloe and Way, for example, distinguish the purpose of therapy as ‘problem or crisis-centred with the emphasis on diagnosis, analysis or healing’ and which ‘might include testing, prescribed drugs, a focus on early life experience, involvement with other family members.’ (2000, p12). They describe how therapy is grounded in extensive theory. Conversely, they describe coaching as typically result or performance oriented with the emphasis on taking action and sustaining changes over time and that it is used to improve performance in a specific area, is more practice driven and relies strongly on interpersonal skills.

Grant has proposed a model that suggests that coaching is distinguished by the essentially normal population that it supports, whilst counselling has a deviant, pathological focus (2000). Stone (1999) also differentiates between the three skills of mentoring, coaching and counselling and argues that any confusion goes deeper than semantics. Coaching, she claims is ‘continually developing employees so that they do their jobs well’; counselling is concerned with ‘poorer performers’ (p3). There has also been the view that coaching is mainly proactive and counselling is generally reactive (Whitmore, 1997).

It appears that coaches, in an attempt to distinguish themselves from counsellors, emphasise only those elements of counselling that are in contrast with coaching. Coaches have found a niche in the market with an ‘anti-counselling orientation’ which, in some cases, has been bolstered by ‘the promise of quick and painless improvement of performance’ (Berglas, 2002 p5). They are also cautious of the link with therapy because of its association with so called clinically pathological populations. Thus distinguishing coaching services from counselling and therapy can make them appear much more attractive.

On the other hand, those who work in the fields of psychotherapy and counselling argue that coaching is just a different brand name for what they have been doing for quite a long time (Carroll, 2003). Some of them argue that the difference between the two are superficial and might not appear pleased by the growing number of independent coaches, who could be seen as competitors and who do not need to undergo extensive and expensive training. So it is not surprising that counsellors appear to be insisting on the similarities between coaching and counselling and claiming that they are more prepared for the job. Recent articles reflect these concerns: ‘Coaching looks like counselling in disguise – without the stigma, but also without the ethics’; ‘The similarities between counselling and coaching become even more apparent if the methods of coaches are examined’; ‘In practice the trade is currently unregulated, unstructured and (potentially) unethical’ (Williams and Irving, 2001, p3-7).

Both counsellors and coaches have an agenda in this argument and both tend to over-emphasise some factors and downplay others. For instance coaches introduce their services as focusing on the present and the future as opposed to counselling, which supposedly deals with the past. They ignore the fact that a number of counselling approaches are very much present-centred (eg Egan, 1982; Ellis, 1993; Glasser, 1985). Counsellors on the other hand, emphasising the similarity between
the two sometimes ignore important differences such as the context of coaching and the nature of accountability to a ‘double client’ – the individual and organisation. We believe that this forced estrangement between coaching and counselling is not beneficial for either side. Coaches particularly might lose rather more than they gain in the continuous efforts to separate themselves from being associated with counselling.

There are a number of issues in coaching, the understanding of which could be enriched by close examination of similar issues in the counselling field. One of these issues is the current lack of overt conceptual and theoretical grounds for coaching. As Peltier has pointed out much coaching is presently ‘atheoretical, from the point of view of mainstream psychology’ (2001, p xvi) and that although there is a growing literature on how to do coaching ‘most coaching books do not effectively establish a direct relationships between psychological methods and coaching practice’ (p xiii).

Another significant area of concern is a lack of research evaluating the effectiveness of coaching interventions. Whitney (2001, in West and Milan, p85) has identified how the coaching profession currently revolves around the statement ‘coaching is helpful because clients say it is helpful’. Whitney identifies that there is an ‘inescapable subjectivity or bias’ within that assessment which is well known in psychotherapy and counselling research, in that most clients will judge the process as ‘worthwhile and effective to some degree’ (p87). Furthermore, an anecdotal approach to evaluating the effectiveness of the coaching intervention is not helpful. Lamenting the lack of research into any type of development coaching, Whitney forecasts that: ‘in due course, professional coaching will need to demonstrate its efficacy’ particularly in relation to
alternative forms of development and can build on the experience of nearly a century of psychotherapy and counselling research which has consistently demonstrated its effectiveness as a process (p89).

There is a considerable body of research into the dynamics of relationship during psychotherapy and counselling and we believe that coaches cannot approach their work ethically without some form of understanding of these. We therefore, agree with the arguments put forward by many counsellors that some substantial form of training for coaches, built on the experiences of training in counselling, is essential.

At the same time we believe that counsellors also have something to lose from an estrangement exacerbated by gate keeping in the profession and undermining coaching as a professional service based on the similar type of helping relationship. The situation is reminiscent to some extent of the not very smooth process of establishing counselling as a separate discipline, some two decades ago. Just exactly as it was not possible to stop the process then, it does not seem wise to fight the inevitable now. A number of factors are discussed in this article which support the argument for co-existence.

West and Milan (2001 p29-31) make the case for coaching as a marriage between two disciplines (consulting and counselling) and claim that it is this blend of ‘content and process consulting’ that has given rise to the popularity of coaching. In this article we foster the counselling element of this claim, highlighting a theoretical basis for coaching in counselling and proposing a decorous co-existence between the two. Drawing on the literature and our own experience as academics in the fields of psychology and adult development we explore coaching’s intrinsic links with counselling, present an argument aimed at clarifying the real difference and introduce a model that highlights a possible interactive relationship between counselling theory and coaching practice.

In order to build a bridge over the troubled waters of unresolved or imaginary differences between coaching and counselling we now explore the situation that has led to the birth of coaching. We believe this will illustrate the closeness of their aims. Next, we want to take issue with some false ideas on which the separation between two fields is built, offering at the same time a model that is aimed at clarifying some of the existing differences and similarities between them. Finally we offer a model of coaching which demonstrates how counselling can enrich and benefit coaching.

The need for coaching

We would argue that the establishment of coaching as a profession has become a reality because it answers the needs of a growing number of people for personal development, however different their initial drives – psychological pain or the desire to become more successful professionally. It also reflects the current situation in western and westernised societies in which the quality of relationships and particularly helping relationships seem to be constantly decreasing.

Among the many reasons for this are the sheer speed of contemporary life, overpopulation and some current social phenomena, such as growing consumerism and competitiveness that could be damaging to quality relationships. On the other hand, with the increasing spread of information, especially via the Internet, people are aware that there are certain types of relationships that provide not only relief from pain and problems, but sometimes bring about satisfaction with work and are beneficial for confidence and various skills and competences. As it happens, these outcomes are not only valuable for individuals but also can be effectively exploited by companies and businesses. This surely creates demand and creation of this demand fuels the growth in coaching.

If we assume that the growing number of forms of ‘helping by talking’ is the result of the need of people for personal and professional growth and a more fulfilling life, then the growing variety of these forms is a positive phenomenon. Giddens has argued that we are all becoming more reflexive: ‘What to do? How to act? How to be?’ says Giddens, are increasingly questions for the individual once (and if) his or her elemental material needs have been met (Giddens, 1991 p70). Coaching as well as other helping-by-talking professions can
assist in facilitating this reflective process. This also may lead to a more psychologically literate society.

Additionally, coaching serves that part of society, which might not use psychotherapy or counselling services and so encourages the process of personal development in a wider section of people. Whatever the explicit purpose of the service may be, a successful helping process can bring about increased self-awareness, perceptiveness and social awareness, beneficial for individuals, businesses or societies. On the basis of the above we believe that there is a good reason to celebrate the need for coaching because we see it as an ally for counselling in the process of improving wellbeing of individuals.

Misconceptions and muddy water
At the same time, we would argue that there is a need to discard what we see as false ideas about the differences between coaching and counselling. One of these is a claim that coaching is about working only in a positive spectrum of development in contrast to counselling, which is perceived as dealing with problems. This claim is flawed, not least because it deals with categories that are defined in terms of opposites. So ignoring ‘failure’, for example, cannot bring ‘success’. Analysis of case studies in executive coaching show that coaching is more than often offered when there is a problem in performance that needs to be addressed (Berglas, 2002). Coaches cannot avoid working with ‘blocks’ to development within the client and for this reason, we would argue, they need to build on the body of knowledge developed in psychotherapy and counselling.

Examples from practice also elicit the unsoundness of the argument for differentiating between the two fields on the grounds that they are serving two kinds of population: mentally healthy and ‘clinical’ (Grant, 2000). This argument cannot be sustained even conceptually, as the definition of mental health is still an area of academic debate. There is also a serious ethical issue bound up with identifying people as belonging to a clinical population only on the basis that they have decided to improve the quality of their emotional life with the help of a professional counsellor. On the contrary, we would argue that it is a sign of mental health that a person recognises the critical periods in life and decides to engage actively in the process of exploring them through counselling.

Let us consider, for example, two executives in exactly the same situation and stage in their life. One of them is blindly pursuing his career taking up more and more coaching to improve his performance but being completely unaware that he is using this to avoid facing the unbearable situation his pursuit has created for him and his family. Another one realises one day that he is in the ‘rat race’ and how damaging it is for himself and his family and has the courage to ask for professional help in order to explore the meaning of this stage in his life. Who is more of a clinical’ case out of these two?

In the light of this example it is apparent that anyone could be engaged in both counselling and coaching processes, even at the same time if necessary, and with no stigma attached. The division between clinical and non-clinical population may serve only those who are happy to ignore the underlying issues during coaching that sometimes prevent real progress in the client. According to Berglas (2002), this disregard could make psychological problems even worse, causing disastrous consequences for individual clients and for whole businesses.

The misconceptions highlighted here often lead coaches to develop their own definitions of counselling in order to contrast it with their services, instead of using the definitions that are accepted within the counselling profession itself. For example, the definition of counselling put forward by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy is ‘to give the client an opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more resourcefully and toward greater wellbeing’. This definition does not appear to be significantly different from some definitions of coaching.

Considering this definition and knowing about the immense variety of approaches and applications of counselling in different settings actually suggests that there is not much that coaching can offer in terms of the individual’s developmental goals that counselling cannot do just as well. It would not be difficult to find a counselling approach that would suit a particular client with a need for coaching.

Perceived realities and clear blue water
There are, however, some significant differences, which – if identified and discussed could enrich the coaching process. The end result of counselling is defined by the individual and potentially there are no limitations as to where the process may lead, because counselling is concerned with all aspects of the client’s life. The end result of coaching, particularly within organisations, may also be defined by the client, but usually the goals are aligned in the direction that is also useful for the organisation. If an individual client wished to develop only along the lines drawn by the organisation then there may be no need to
differentiate between coaching and counselling. But sometimes the individual needs of the client dictate spending more time on developing qualities that could help him or her to move forward in more fundamental ways, or to overcome old blocks to development. These may not be within the spectrum of the immediate needs of the organisation and may even be in contradiction to its interests. In this case the scope of coaching would be limited. The counsellor in contrast, is not restricted in the depth of support he/she can give to the client.

From the perspective of individual development the end goals of counselling can be much more strategic than those of most types of coaching. They can extrapolate from dealing with problems to the development, for example, of the ‘fully functioning person’ introduced by Carl Rogers (1961)\(^1\). The end goals of coaching, on the other hand, with their orientation on performance improvement and, frequently, the benefits to the organisation are bound to be focused on only one or two, and maybe not even the main areas, of a client’s life. Coaches may see their work in a wider context of universal values of life rather than the narrowly defined goals of an organisation: however, in most cases if they care about their reputation in this field, they have to acknowledge accountability to an organisation along with a commitment to produce an outcome which is of value to the organisation as much as to the client.

Some organisations do not restrict coaches to the area of work performance for various reasons and in this case they are free to offer their support to clients wherever the process may take them. In the ideal case the organisation may pay for the most open-ended type of coaching, believing in the value of developing individuals. This could, however, contradict the main purpose of business – profit – and as Peltier points out ‘to confuse the profit motive with other tasks or motives is to do a disservice to shareholders, who are counting on

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**Figure 1: Comparison of ‘helping by talking’ processes**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ultimate purpose or end result</th>
<th>Development of the individual</th>
<th>Eliminating psychological problems or dysfunctions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving business</td>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>Groupwork</td>
<td>Psychotherapy</td>
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<td>Psychotherapy</td>
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<td>Psychotherapy</td>
<td>Causal</td>
<td>Performance by Development of the individual</td>
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<td>Mental function</td>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>Performance by Development of the individual</td>
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<td>Emotional change</td>
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\(^1\) Rogers, C. (1961)
you. To place other functions ahead of profit is unethical’ (Peltier, 2001, p23711).

So we argue that the main difference between coaching in organisations and counselling is the double accountability of coaches – to the client and to the organisation. This may create ethical complications in coaching, that counselling, being overtly individually oriented, can avoid.

The model shown in Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship of all ‘helping-by-talking’ processes in relation to the initial motivation of the client and the ultimate goal of each process. We believe that in most cases the initial motivation of clients to undertake counselling, groupwork and psychotherapy is different from coaching. It varies from the wish of the individuals to eliminate psychological problems or dysfunctions to just a desire to explore some patterns or critical periods in life in order to improve their wellbeing.

Motivation for coaching, on the other hand, comes most often from the determination of the individual, supported or even stimulated by the organisation to improve performance. It could also be just personal and professional development, particularly in cases when the individual pays for this service and organisations are not involved. We would argue that in this particular case coaching is not very different from counselling and psychotherapy because whatever the initial motivation may be, the ultimate goal of the process is the same.

**The need for theories**

There is another feature that clearly indicates the difference between counselling and coaching. Counselling is built on comprehensive theories. Coaching, as a new profession, does not at present have any elaborate theories about development of its own. Whilst there has been an exponential growth in practical coaching, the conceptual ground that coaching is built upon could be viewed as, at best, multidisciplinary, and at worst
as theoretical or even anti-theoretical. A plethora of coaching courses has done little to alleviate the concerns of those looking for a theoretical basis for their work and many are worried about the lack of proper understanding by coaches, particularly where the psychological development of the individual is a concern.

It is unlikely that practicing coaches do not have their own implicit theories, but these are very often the models of ‘how’, with very little, if any, element of ‘why’ and as Flaherty (1999) recognises are almost always ignored in coaching textbooks. Some action-oriented models (such as the GROW model), however useful, have little explicit acknowledged basis in theory. Moreover, there is an argument that exactly because of its practical focus, coaching does not need theories. This may be a valid argument, but, perhaps, for a very different reason. Perhaps, coaching oriented to individual development does not need its own theories, but can be based on the developmental theories within counselling. With further development of the field new theories of coaching will possibly be created. However, the history of counselling shows that it is a very slow process, and new ideas are still very close to the existing fundamental ones, which could be just as useful for coaching.

Before presenting our final model linking coaching practice with counselling theories we would like to clarify what we mean by theories in this context. The essential elements of an elaborate counselling theory usually are:

- main concepts and assumption about human nature
- conditions for development
- obstacles to development
- tasks and goals of development
- methods and techniques of facilitating development
- relationship between helper and the client
- essential processes/dynamics
- pitfalls and limitations.

These are very fundamental aspects of the theories developed in counselling and psychotherapy and because they are so fundamental they could be applicable to a variety of helping practices. It is possible that new coaching theories will not be very different in essence from the counselling ones. In the meantime, counselling theories can serve as a useful framework for coaching practice. If they strike a chord as a ‘big picture’ of the world, people and development for individuals, coaches can use them to recognise developmental patterns and plan their action in a coherent way. The use of such theories by coaches could also give an opportunity to communicate with colleagues in the counselling field about the developmental phenomena in order to enrich both practices and provide the framework for mutually useful research.

We now present a model of coaching that demonstrates its close relationship to counselling; a model, which we believe, can contribute to reconciliation of the unfortunate split between the two. The central point of the coaching process according this model is assessment. This is not an assessment of the client only, but also of the employing organisation as a whole with its values and culture, of the situation in which the client needs to succeed and the role and degree of freedom of the coach in this situation. Next, the results of the assessment are related to the targets set by the individual client and the organisation in order to evaluate how realistic they are, to develop a plan of action and to select appropriate coaching methods. This is followed by the chosen interventions on behalf of the coach and identified actions by the client. If the desired change is happening and is assessed again as sufficient in relation to the targets and the situation, then the cycle is complete or targets are moved to a different level and the cycle repeats itself as long as it is needed.

However, this is an ideal which could happen only theoretically. In reality coaches have to work with clients who have underlying issues discovered even as early as during the first assessment, that might prevent their progress. For example, a coach can find that a client who needs to develop the skills of delegation is not able to trust anyone. This is an underlying issue that needs serious exploration and possible intervention depending on the therapeutic approach applied. It is at this point that the coach needs to be aware of the potential for referral to a counsellor who may be able to deal with the underlying issue or evaluate his/her ability to address this issue in the context of the contract with this particular client and organisation. If a decision is made to proceed, this underlying
issue is evaluated via the knowledge of appropriate theory, the coaching interventions are enriched by specific selected counselling methods and the following reassessment is performed in the context wider than performance improvement. For example any progress in delegating is assessed with consideration of the initial predicaments as well as the established targets.

We also argue that when coaching is offered in organisations, at the stage of initial or intermediate assessment, the coach needs to see and evaluate the organisational issues as a context for individual work with a client. We suggest that the knowledge of management theories and organisational development would also be an invaluable asset for the practising coach. For example, culture and values of the organisation may dictate a specific view on the leadership style of the client, which would obviously influence the target and the process of coaching.

The model implies that a good understanding of some major counselling theories is necessary in order to be able to notice and interpret developmental phenomena and blocks to development. It would be particularly useful if the coach were sufficiently proficient in the use of the methods of at least one of the counselling approaches. It could help to enrich the repertoire of his/her skills when dealing with underlying issues and blocks to a client's development.

We further believe that understanding of counselling theories, application of these in coaching, plus continuous reflection on the process could serve as a contribution to the process of development of the theoretical knowledge in coaching as a newly developing field. In this way we see the beginnings of the new profession of coaching, contributing to the process of individual development building on the body of knowledge developed in counselling. Similarly we anticipate a developing cooperation and collaboration between counsellors and coaches, with each respecting the work of the other.

Conclusion
In this article we have discussed the issue of the theoretical and practical development of the coaching profession and its current controversial relationship with counselling. We likened this development to the divisions between counselling and psychotherapy and agree with Gold et al (2002 p44”) that ‘new professions are and will continue to emerge whilst existing professions will need to adjust their view of their discipline and test the field more proactively if they are to survive’.

To bridge the potential split between counselling and coaching we have clarified the similarities and differences between them and introduced a model that applies the existing body of theoretical knowledge developed within counselling to the application of coaching. We anticipate that the model could facilitate the process of dealing with blocks to the individual development of clients and that it demonstrates a legitimate and useful link between counselling theory and coaching practice.

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