

Using a critical perspective, analyse the strengths and limitations of your core theoretical approach in a coaching context. (Please make reference to the competences and capability indicators at senior practitioner level throughout).

The core theoretical model in my coaching practice is 'Therapeutic Coaching' (TC) (CI 73). TC is a contemporary model which is not clearly defined in the world of coaching (Jackson and Parsons 2016, 81); as an integrative model, definitions of TC are expansive and the approach is open to interpretation. For me, Sue Jackson and Andrew Parsons' definition of TC feels closest to my own understanding of the model and it is this definition I will be referring to in this critical analysis (CI 98). For Jackson and Parsons, TC is

A non-directive process, which provides an environment of safety, trust and empathy...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 (ibid)

For the purposes of this critical analysis, I am including clean language, mindfulness, neuroscience, person-centred coaching, somatic psychology and personal consultancy in my understanding of TC.

Unlike other goal-focused coaching models, the TC model holds space for the coachee's emotions and attempts to get to the core of the coachee's reason for engaging with coaching. In order to do this, the coach must bring the Rogerian core qualities into their practice (Rogers 1957) (CI 84), these qualities include

1. *Congruence or genuineness*
2. *Unconditional positive regard and acceptance*
3. *Accurate empathic understanding (Peltier 2010, 105)*

The Rogerian framework is essential in the TC model because in order to access the core of the coachee's reason for engaging with coaching the coach must be alongside the coachee in their experience, they must have a non-judgemental acceptance of the coachee as they are in the 'here and now' and must be able to support the coachee in reaching the emotional depth (CI 84) that TC seeks to achieve. According to Summerfield, working with the TC model - and its integration of the coachee's 'emotional life' - means that the coach "*may be constantly switching between coaching and counselling during a single session*" (2002). For many, the 'switching' between counselling and coaching, that TC offers space for, can feel too close to counselling and the model has therefore received criticism for this approach (cited but not argued by Popovic and Jinks 2014) (CI 84-90).

Understanding these dilemmas around the TC model, many coaches navigate this by underpinning their approach with a practice of mindfulness (CI 76 & 84), which is described by Jon Kabat-Zinn as "*a way of paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally*" (1994, 59). The coach working with the TC model must be mindful throughout the session of how they manage 'switching' between coaching and counselling modes appropriately and effectively (CI 81 & 90). The complexity of managing this model, and holding the boundaries that can be blurred by the TC approach, means that contracting and 'on the spot' contracting are of paramount importance to the success and safety of the coaching relationship and managing the coachee's expectations. As well as the necessity to manage the coachee's expectations, the coach engaging in a TC model must also be open with themselves - constantly and mindfully 'checking in' with themselves and their own processes, as well as their ability to 'hold' the emotional depth of the coachee. This is where the dual-practitioner's skills come into focus; Nash Popovic and Debra Jinks recognise that the coach who does *not* have the therapeutic experience of the dual-practitioner may find themselves "*out of their depth*" (CI 74) when working with a TC model and without proper

therapeutic training they can risk doing more harm than good (2004, 43) (CI 81). The Association for Coaching is clear that every coach must “*recognise their own limitations of competence and the need to exercise boundary management*” (Association for Coaching 2008 cited by Passmore and Mortimer 2011) (CI 80 & 81). This is particularly pertinent when working with the TC model and commitment to ongoing and appropriate supervision with a supervisor who has a modality or interest in the TC model is essential (CI 98); engagement with a supervisor who works within the TC model means that the purist perspective is upheld and honoured, and the possibility of the coach’s practice being diluted is reduced (CI 80).

Echoing the Gestalt model (Leary-Joyce 2014, 210), when working with the TC model the coach practices being in the ‘here and now’. Again, the coach’s ability to remain in this ‘here and now’ state (CI 94) is underpinned by the practice of mindfulness, which the coach models to the coachee. There is an emphasis on ‘being’ with the coachee rather than ‘doing’ (Popovic and Jinks 2014, 45; Jackson and Parsons 2016). This focus on the present - instead of a more traditional coaching focus on the future - allows the coachee to get what they need ‘there and then’ in the session and this space can often lead to the unfolding of more information which can inform the coachee’s long-term goals (CI 96 & 97). Whilst the TC model is not as obviously ‘goal orientated’ as other solution-based approaches, its emphasis on being in the ‘here and now’ does not mean that future goals are forgotten about. Popovic and Jinks are clear that the success of long-term change depends on exploring what is happening in the ‘here and now’, writing “*we cannot secure a lasting change without dealing with deeper issues that may be the roots of particular behaviour manifestations*” (2014,42). Although the idea of exploring ‘roots’ is based in counselling models (CI 82 & 83) and is often dismissed in the coaching world, Julia Vaughan Smith (2019) believes that exploration of past trauma can be worked with in coaching provided the coach stays grounded and has the ability to hold something heavy, in content, in a light way (CI 88). In TC the future is not always the immediate concern if it does not fit in the coachee’s agenda; for example, if the coachee does bring deeper issues into the session, TC can accommodate this, and it is considered that this is an important conversation to have.

The ‘here and now’ focus of TC can also help with the pacing and number of coaching sessions (CI 83- 96). Unlike other more solution-based models - for example TGROW and OSKAR - which often have a ‘one size fits all’ approach to the coaching process and don’t always work with the ‘wholeness’ of the coachee, the TC model and its ‘here and now’ focus offer a flexible way of working that creates an ‘individual fit’ according to the specific needs of each coachee. Coachees choosing to access TC may feel fearful around the prospect of the future and working in the ‘here and now’ supports them to stay in a safer place. For some coachees this ‘safer place’ may be no explicit goal at all; this can be supported by the TC process as within TC goal-attainment is not a prerequisite (Popovic and Jinks 2014, 68). Popovic and Jinks describe the idea of ‘doing’ with the coachee and ‘being’ with the coachee using a four-stage process which includes:

1. *Authentic listening*
2. *Rebalancing*
3. *Generating*
4. *Supporting* (ibid)

The stages of this process are non-linear and it is the fluidity of the process which interests me, as well as the flexibility it offers in creating an ‘individual fit’ for the coachee (ibid). This process allows the coach and coachee to explore the implicit and explicit material (CI 84) that the coachee is bringing which can support more long-term change for the coachee. This links to the ‘*Transtheoretical Model of Behavioural Change*’ (1983), created by Prochaska and DiClemente, which is also non-linear and recognises the cyclical nature of change. Both models offer the coachee a

strong message of success (CI 82 & 83) rather than failure and allow an acceptance of where the coachee is 'at'.

This flexibility of these two models - which are used in the TC approach - offers a space for emergence in the coaching process (CI 96). David Grove has explored the idea of 'emergence' and his work on 'Emergent Knowledge' is summarised by Alan Chapman and Carol Wilson as helping "*people find their own way forward, free from influence or interpretation by the facilitator (or coach, counsellor, etc)*" (2017). Grove suggests 'clean language' as a necessary ingredient in facilitating an interpretation-free approach (Grove and Panzer, 1989) (CI 84). The coachee's actual words have a precise and personal meaning that can be lost if the coach tries to substitute what is not there, thus reducing the possibility of emergence. TC favours a particular set of conditions for asking certain very simple questions in a way that lets the coachee go into their inner experiences (CI 86). Examples of 'clean language questions' include "*What kind of X (is that X)?*" and "*And is there anything else about X?*" (Grove cited by Rees and Chapman 2017) (CI 87). These examples are considered 'Developing questions', they are the first stage of Grove's 12 clean language questions and are followed by the 'Sequence and Source questions' and 'Intention questions' stages (ibid). Similarly to Grove, Nancy Kline (1999) pays great attention to the possibility of the coach's questioning of the coachee as a potential block on the emergent process (CI 87). Kline suggests the use of 'incisive questions', recognising that "*a question requires you to think*" (ibid, 55) and that by asking incisive questions the coach can create what Kline refers to as a 'thinking environment' (ibid, 24) (CI 78). For Kline, creating a 'thinking environment' means that the coach listens to the coachee attentively and resists interrupting (ibid). This approach allows the coach to create and hold space for the coachee and empowers the coachee that they 'hold the answers.'

Having used Kline's technique in my own coaching practice (CI 77), I have received feedback from one coachee (CI 85 & 94) that he has experienced this mode of coaching (non-interruption in order to hold space for emergence) as passive - what I intended to be highly attentive was felt by my coachee as being inattentive - this session was online and my coachee went as far as asking me 'are you still there?'. In this example from my own practice, the coachee came from a corporate background; Kline writes that her approach can be difficult for certain coachees, identifying corporate leaders as "*the worst*" (ibid, 35). She links the difficulty of using a highly attentive and mindful TC approach when working with corporate leaders to their tendency to "*equate talking with looking professional*" (ibid) (CI 95). Like Kline, Grove recognised that for some people the emergent knowledge/clean language approach "*will seem very different from the conventional or logical 'taught' approach to problem-solving and personal change*" (cited by Wilson and Chapman 2017) (CI 82). This belief that talking or teaching equates to professionalism is often paralleled in the wider coaching world with more solution-focused coaches considering TC to be closer to counselling and not 'real' coaching (cited but not argued by Popovic and Jinks 2014) (CI 95).

Often, this critique of the TC model becomes even further embedded when incorporating the field of somatic psychology (CI 96 & 97). Arielle Schwartz comments that by using a mindfulness-based practice the coachee can develop body awareness (2018); for example, there may be evidence of breath constrictions and patterns which denote tension - when this occurs these sensations are regarded by the TC coach as information rather than symptoms. Once a coachee is aware of what Schwartz refers to as '*the somatic experience*' the tension eventually releases, sometimes in tears, the ability to breathe more freely or noticing a lightness through the body (ibid). Schwartz believes that

"somatic psychology is built upon the premise that the body needs to process stressful events through breath and movement. When we do not include body awareness, movement, and conscious

breathing in trauma processing, we limit our ability to work with the client's innate healing capacities" (ibid, 17) (CI 92)

Similarly, to the critiques around Grove and Kline's approaches, the inclusion of somatic psychology in a coaching model is often questioned by coaches who do not use a TC model. Again, the ideas of healing and trauma (CI 89) processing are felt to be too close to counselling and questions around their appropriateness in the delivery of coaching can sometimes be points of contention within the coaching community.

To conclude, the integrative nature of TC allows the model to be wide-ranging, offering the coach who uses the TC model scope and creativity and offering the coachee a holistic experience (CI 89). Unlike more traditional and rigid solution-based models - for example, motivational interviewing (T2C Handbook 2019, 60) - TC allows the 'wholeness' of the coachee to enter the coaching space. Whilst recognising that working with this 'wholeness' has the potential to blur the boundaries of coaching, this is the perfect place for the dual-practitioner who can hold these boundaries effectively (CI 80). For coaches who do not have the training and experience of the dual practitioner, working with the TC model can be overwhelming and ethical dilemmas can appear. The focus when using the TC model needs to be on keeping the coachee, as well as yourself, safe (CI 80). The obvious platform for this is supervision; this professional practice will ensure boundaries and will hold the coach accountable for how they manage the 'switching' between coaching and counselling modes that TC allows for.

In my personal practice, I have been working with the TC model to develop my own 'X' (redacted) package. This package is a combination of somatic psychology, personal consultancy, mindfulness and other techniques (CI 84-89) that are designed to support the coachee in building resilience and long-term change. The use of the 'XX' (redacted) metaphor, which is influenced by Grove and Panzer's metaphor work (1989) (CI 96), allows the coachee to notice and 'shape' their inner-world in a language that they are familiar with and that already holds meaning for them in order to maintain their 'mental fitness'. Underpinning this package with the TC approach allows me to bring a flexibility to this work that models flexibility for the coachee (CI 94) - as Linda Graham notes "*Blessed are they who are flexible, for they shall never be bent out of shape*" (2013, XXV). This humorous quote is a strong reminder that the ability to stay in the 'here and now' and bring flexibility to our worlds equips us with a "*tool for life*" (Kline 1999, 21) (CI 97).

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