

Career development and coaching: Straddling two worlds and bringing them together

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This article distinguishes between the areas of professional practice of 'coaching' and 'career guidance', reviewing recent change and noting the emergence of 'career coaching' as a crossover activity. We argue for further integration of coaching and careers work under this label and note some of the benefits for coaches who are working on career development issues to share a theoretical understanding of career development. We flag some attendant risks of not integrating further and note that a learning focus is a potential shared understanding that could be used as a basis for this ongoing integration.



Introduction

Coaching and career development work have seen the boundaries between them shift and blur over the last twenty years. In this article, we review these two worlds and their mutual influence, arguing for an integrated view of career coaching which draws on the best features of both. In writing, we draw on our respective experiences in delivering and studying career development and coaching programmes, including an action research project for masters dissertation (Rix, 2018), as well as working in private practice under the 'career coaching' label. We will argue that coaching and careers work have already integrated to the extent that career coaching private practice is now a significant part of the landscape of the career development sector. However, there is potential for further alignment and we have practical ideas to support this that we lay out to close.

The method used to build our argument takes a social constructionist approach, drawing on a range of types of literature and exploring the meaning that has emerged through the shared assumptions found within. We take a critical stance on taken-for-granted ways of understanding the coaching profession and ourselves as practitioners, challenging the view that knowledge is based on unbiased observations (Schultheiss & Wallace, 2012). Thus, our readers may have formed different perspectives on the issues we discuss through their own positions in relation to both coaching and career development. As an example, our position is informed by the English context whereas readers in other home nations of the UK and indeed beyond may have different view. We welcome discussion from these different vantage points.

By charting the recent development and challenges of coaching and career guidance we map the terrain and chart the emergence of career coaching. Despite our primary focus on the 'body politic' of coaching and careers work, we do recognise the problems that can come with bounding and labelling different types of helping activity. Defining and codifying an activity such as career coaching has value to create scope for quality assurance through professional accreditations and training. However, by doing so we also risk excluding a rich space beyond its borders where career learning happens in a wide range of contexts. We will walk this tightrope in the mutual exploration that we advocate. We end the article with practical ideas that we would like to see for greater integration of these two perspectives, giving greater recognition and access to the contribution that career coaching can make to improving the working lives of adults in the UK.

A brief history – (how) did we put the ‘career’ in ‘coaching’?

In this section we sketch out developments over the last twenty years, arguing that we have moved from tenuous links between two separate worlds of ‘coaching’ and ‘career guidance’ to a somewhat unrecognised mutual influence and the emergence of ‘career coaching’.

The world of coaching

At the turn of the millennium, coaching was primarily associated with tailored approaches to performance and leadership development amongst management executives. Over the last twenty years, the world of coaching has grown and diversified exponentially. A number of indicators such as textbooks published, individuals defining their work as coaching and an abundance of training courses available all demonstrate a growing market. The International Coach Federation (ICF) talk up coaching in their ‘Global Coaching Study’, which reported that three out of four coach practitioners with active clients said they expect their number of coaching clients to increase over the next twelve months and anticipate an increase in annual revenue from coaching (ICF, 2016). However, this rapid growth makes for a messy landscape, with the emergence of a number of distinct professional bodies for coach practitioners (Lane et al., 2014) offering separate accreditation and training pathways. However it is claimed that fewer than half the estimated coaches in the world belong to such bodies (ibid). Trained coach practitioners themselves understandably advocate for the importance of such training:

When asked to identify the biggest obstacle for coaching over the next 12 months, the main concern expressed by coach practitioners was untrained individuals who call themselves coaches.

ICF 2016, p. 19

In addition, the ICF Global Consumer Study of 2017 survey reveals that certifications and credentials are also important to consumers of coaching. Among those who had experienced being coached 83%

of respondents stated it was either important or very important that their coach has a certification/credential (with a slight dip to 76% for those who had not been coached).

Despite this importance, coaching has struggled to self-regulate. Stober (2014, p. 420) argues that ‘we still have a chaotic and uneven landscape of professional development’ with the varying approaches resulting in different pictures of what a coaching professional should need in terms of development. From the perspective of an aspiring coach, the number and variety of coaching training organisations and types of coaching can be overwhelming. From a professional perspective, the lack of consensus about what defines coaching, and the various training programmes and certifications leads to a substantial difference in ability, credentials, and experience within the profession.

Central to the debate is the gap in standardised coaching competencies. There is currently no generally agreed competency model, although professional bodies have certain credentialing criteria that are common. The most recognised organisation internationally remains the International Coach Federation (ICF) with the Association of Coaching (AC) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) following closely as trusted and credible professional bodies from a UK perspective.

Whilst coaching is happening in a wide range of contexts, embedded in organisational internal coaching schemes and used in helping relationships from family support to personal tutoring, the dominant resourcing model represented by this ‘body politic’ of coaching remains the self-employed coach contracting to work with an individual client, either paid for by the employer or the client themselves. This suggests a relatively resource intensive activity that will be available only to those who can leverage the necessary resources. Costs for private coaching range considerably, although some practitioners are relatively affordable, others command a premium price in this free market. Western’s critical view distinguishes between this context and the micro-practices which comprise coaching, discerning four dominant discourses in coaching: the ‘soul guide’, the ‘psy expert’, the ‘network coach’ or ‘managerial coach’ (Western, 2012).

Across these four discourses, there are now many theoretical based approaches to coaching and a variety of contexts, genres and titles. In their *Complete Handbook of Coaching*, Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck (2014, p 8) list distinct genres of:

- Skills and performance coaching.
- Developmental coaching.
- Transformational coaching.
- Executive and leadership coaching.
- The manager as coach.
- Team coaching.
- Peer coaching.
- Life coaching.
- Health and wellness coaching.
- Career coaching.
- Cross-cultural coaching.

We will explore the idea of career coaching as a distinct subset later. Passmore (2021) constructs a similar list of genres of coaching and distinguishes between forms of coaching and activities allied to coaching. Career guidance is listed as one of these, which leads us to consider the parallel developments in the 'adjacent' field.

The world of career guidance

In some contrast to the development of coaching, career guidance has historically been viewed as a public good associated with initial career choice, supporting young people in their transition between education and work. Its wider economic and social public benefits, as well as being privately beneficial for individuals in finding a rewarding working life, have led to it receiving public funds and being provided by educational institutions. As labour market turbulence has led to more need for adults to receive transition support, publicly funded provision has also been available for those seeking to find work or change work direction, albeit directed towards those with lower levels of skills and qualifications. This may suggest a view that highly skilled adults are in a position to finance their own career support and that the private benefits (e.g. more fulfilling work) outweigh the imperative to reduce the need for state support. The perceived adequacy of this provision and its reorganising, devaluing and underfunding have been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Gough, 2017), reaching a

nadir in 2010. Whilst careers work has received much better public attention in England since, leading to the creation of the Careers and Enterprise Company in 2015 and a government strategy launched in 2017 based around an agreed series of benchmarks for schools, there are still serious gaps in the availability of publicly funded career guidance for adults. Suffice to say that coaching has burgeoned at a time when career guidance has suffered.

In contrast to the rather narrow scope of publicly funded career guidance in the UK, definitions of career and the scope of career development work are broad and expansive and have arguably outgrown the traditional career guidance context. Training routes have extracted from transdisciplinary perspectives drawing on vocational psychology, sociological, learning, organisational and narrative theories.

A constant debate in the world of career development practice concerns the terminology of career and its potential to exclude. Commonplace or 'folk' definitions of career ascribe it to a certain type of work, suggesting hierarchical progression and organisational contexts (stable forms of employment that are arguably becoming less common as labour markets change). However, the theoretical base for careers work holds with broader definitions, such as those used by the Chicago School of Sociology, reminding us of both the subjective and objective career (Hughes, 1937). This enables us to conceptualise career as both the internal meaning made by any individual as they journey through their life experiences as well as the external and observable roles and positions held. The careers world also has had its own problems with integration of different theoretical traditions. As Inkson, Dries and Arnold (2015) note, an analysis of two traditions shows that vocational psychology and organisation studies do not often reference and cite each other. Added to this the contributions of wider fields from transpersonal psychology to the sociology of work and labour market economics, and the career development world is already a very wide field knitting multiple strands together.

A particular feature of career guidance highlighted by this discussion is how it sees and values itself as socially situated. In a much quoted account, Watts (1992) demonstrated how guidance is a political

process, operating 'at the interface between individual and society, between self and opportunity, between aspiration and realism' (Watts, 1996, p. 352). Watts' work articulated four distinct socio-political ideologies underpinning guidance, dependent on the core focus (society or individual) and the distinction between an emphasis on change, or the status quo. If core focus remains on the individual, a progressive stance is the best that can be hoped for, and if not focusing on change then this has the potential to be conservatising.

	Change	Status Quo
Core focus on society	Radical	Liberal
Core focus on individual	Progressive	Conservative

Figure 1. Socio-political ideologies in guidance (Watts, 1992: 355)

In the career development world, this analysis, and a growing sense that career guidance should be focused not just on individuals but on society (Mignot, 2001) and on system change (OECD, 2004), has led to an emergent focus on career guidance for social justice (Arthur et al., 2013; Hooley et al., 2015; Irving, 2009).

Career coaching

We now turn to the intertwining of career guidance and coaching and explore the status of the emergent category of 'career coaching'. We will consider its particular features and its scope before drawing together some implications and ideas for the future.

As the status problems experienced by career guidance coincided with the growth of coaching, the latter's practices, training and literature began to influence the world of career development practice. Frigerio (2016) notes the varying reactions to 'coaching' as a term from those in career guidance world. Responses observed ranged from curiosity, enthusiasm (and maybe from converts, evangelical zeal) cynicism and distaste. A particular focus of discussion was the contrast between coaching's norm of repeat sessions with one client, allowing for actions between sessions to be discussed and explored, and reduced access to career guidance meaning that many clients

would have one appointment only. In higher education career guidance practice, coaching became associated with a shift to shorter, repeat appointments sometimes labelled as 'career coaching' but covering the same ground as career guidance.

At the same time, as Yates (2021) notes, career has become a more relevant concept in coaching. Two patterns have emerged. The first is that despite the focus on executive coaching as a tool for personalised learning to boost performance, coaching soon began to address career related concerns. Whilst helping executives to perform better, coaches found themselves also discussing career issues such as alignment of personal motivations and goals with their daily work or managing transitions through and between organisations. The second is the development of career coaching as a distinct area of practice that some coaches choose to focus on in their market positioning. Indeed, both the 2014 Complete Handbook of Coaching (Cox et al.) and Passmore's more recent Coaches' Handbook (2020) include chapters on career coaching as a specialism. There is a contradiction here between holding career coaching as a *subset* of coaching and career guidance as an *adjacent* practice, without acknowledging that they are largely the same thing.

Moving to the distinctive features of *career coaching* Rix (2018) highlights both the use of labour market insights and the tangible outcomes of job change as distinct features of career coaching. Hazen and Steckler define career coaching as 'maximising insights that are intrapersonal, interpersonal and market based and turn those insights into action strategies. Career coaches bring the advantage of objectivity, information and planning to the pursuit of goals' (2014, p. 329). Career coaches provide practical guidance on job search and application processes (including the use of Curriculum Vitae documents and creative use of networking tools such as LinkedIn) as well as drawing on market information and trends. They disputably have a more results orientated approach than other fields of coaching, with tangible measurable outcomes for the client (e.g. A new job).

So whilst career coaching can be viewed as a subset of coaching, a more expansive definition would include career development conversations in wider

coaching settings as well as career guidance practice. Frigerio and McCash (2013) positions career coaching as a broad concept generous enough to embrace a wide range of practices holding coaching, career guidance and beyond. This includes formal and informal coaching conversations touching on career development issues as well as formal career development services offered by a professionally accredited Career Development Practitioner.

Moreover, an increasingly wide range of organisations and individuals have sought explicit support with managing career through the lifespan. At an organisational level this has developed into a form of career consulting to employing organisations undertaken by specific consulting organisations (Career Innovation, 2021; Career Counselling Services, 2021). At a professional level, a manifestation of this is the bringing together of a previously separate professional body the 'Association of Career Professionals International - UK branch' into the fold of the Career Development Institute (CDI) in 2013 and the development of a thriving private practice community within it.

The literature reviewed suggests that both careers work and coaching sit within a wider frame of learning. Our proposal is that by using learning as the unifying construct between them, we can increasingly bring the two areas together, using the idea of the learning alliance (McCash, 2020) as the basis for further integration.

Implications

Having identified the distinctive features of career-relevant coaching, we now turn to the professional training needed. A benefit we would like to propose of this further integration would be to equip coaches who are working on career issues with the same theoretical basis as career development practitioners. Without such a basis, coaches are at risk of falling into a number of traps which career development practitioners navigate repeatedly. The first is that by working with their focus solely on the individual, they underestimate the social and systemic factors influencing career and are working on what Watts (1996) would characterise on a progressive-conservatising continuum. A second is linked and is

the risk of developing an overall narrow definition of career itself, seeing it in its organisational context and therefore more excluding and elitist than some of the wider definitions discussed earlier. Finally, coaches risk lacking knowledge of labour market insights and sources of career specific learning that help clients to understand changes in the labour market, trends and opportunities.

Career development theories can help the coach integrate understandings of individual characteristics and behaviours with their context, from the immediate community, to wider systemic influence and labour market perspectives. Integrative frameworks such as Patton and McMahon's Systems Theory Framework (1999) are expansive in scope to hold all these together. Without these, coaches risk perpetuating individualising and responsibilising discourses that leave each person careering alone. This in turn will only perpetuate the problem of career coaching being a predominantly private good, available only to those with the resources to access it. Without the further integration that we propose, more people will enter coaching and thus work on career development issues without any awareness of how their practice could be enriched by career development theories. Many coaches will look to fragmented world of coaching organisations for their CPD rather than to the CDI and define their professional competences in terms of coaching processes and practices rather than the contextual and systemic perspectives covered in many career development theories.

In return, the theoretical base of coaching has much to offer the career development practitioner, from cognitive behavioural practices to address motivation and barriers to change through to transpersonal and psychodynamic approaches which enable us to work at greater depth with clients, focusing on being present, listening and questioning clients to support their learning.

Towards further integration

We have demonstrated in this article that both coaching and career guidance have had different credibility and professionalisation challenges. It is our hope that bringing them together can be mutually beneficial. In particular, the integration of

multiple professional organisations into the Career Development Institute, who manage access to a Register of Career Development Practitioners with a level 6 qualification as benchmark, has provided much needed leverage for career development that could be of use to coaches.

It is our belief that coaches offering career development support will benefit from career development focused knowledge of relevant theories, particularly those concerning community and systemic influences. This includes the particular power of the career development world to draw on labour market and employer knowledge to support client learning decisions and transitions appropriately. Likewise a career guidance practitioner seeking to brand themselves as a coach will benefit from understanding core concepts of coaching about client confidence, motivation and self-limiting beliefs. An emphasis on both practices in their common focus on learning and the idea that practitioner and client form a 'learning alliance' is where common ground can be found. We welcome mutual discussion bringing coaches and career development professionals into ever greater union as the next step change for our area of work.

Practical ideas for further alignment

We hope this article can stimulate further discussion within both coaching and career development worlds about how we integrate their respective riches in career coaching. We would like to see both coaches and career development practitioners use one another's competence frameworks to stimulate a reflective process and assist with identifying areas for continuing professional development. Internal coaching networks in organisations and coach supervision groups can draw attention to systemic and ethical dimensions and raise consciousness of systemic influences and context. Career coaches can use career development theories to broaden their thinking about how careers develop, enriching their practice along the way.



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