

Why is Progress a Controversial Issue in Coaching?

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Abstract

In coaching there is a lack of research that focuses specifically on progress, despite increasing global debate on what progress means for individuals and societies. This study uses the coach's experience to explore some of the dilemmas and controversies that the coach may face when dealing with the phenomenon of progress. The heuristic inquiry, used metaphors to draw upon the experience of the researcher and ten other coaches from executive, life and community coaching. Three main themes arose; who determines what progress means in the coaching relationship, identifying indicators of progress, and the coach's experience. The findings suggest that the coaching profession has both a duty of care towards its membership and an important role to play in contributing to the global debate on progress. Moreover, indicators of progress are paradoxical in nature and open to misinterpretation by different stakeholders but adopting a new mindset may help increase organisational effectiveness.

Key words: progress, coaching, executive, community coaching, ROI, heuristic

Introduction

This paper explores the dilemmas that the coach encounters in helping the coaching client progress. It focuses on the ethical and controversial issues that arise from various stakeholders in the coaching relationship seeking to define what progress means from their perspective. Coaching is defined here as:

...collaborative, individualised, solution-focused, results orientated, systematic... stretching, fosters self directed learning and should be evidence-based and incorporate ethical practice (Grant, 2006, p13).

The paper comprises five sections: an introduction that provides the context of the study; the Literature Review, evidencing current empirical research; a methodology section detailing the Heuristic Inquiry approach used; Findings and Discussion, exploring the three major themes that emerged and the Conclusion, outlining the recommendations for further research.

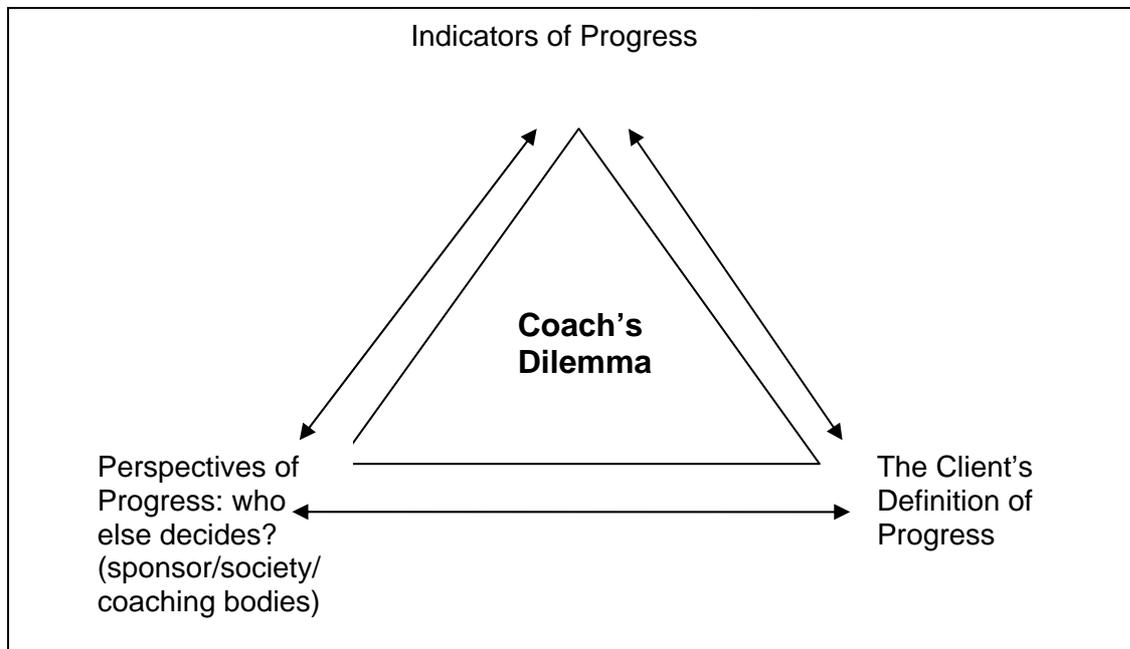
Russell (1961, p459) has argued that progress is an ethical and controversial issue, determined by a minority to the detriment of the majority, suggesting that "change is one thing; progress is another." The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009) website depicts progress as a complex phenomenon and contends that even between nations there is a lack of agreement about what it is: "progress undoubtedly means different things to different societies". The same lack of agreement as to a definition of progress can be applied to

individuals: “What does ‘progress’ mean to the world’s citizens? There can be few questions of greater importance in today’s rapidly changing world” (OECD, 2009).

Given that progress is an important yet problematic issue it would seem vital for the coaching profession to engage with this debate at a global, societal and individual level to consider how the ethical and controversial issues of progress may impact on the profession, the coach and the client. Furthermore, I suggest it is vital for the coach to be aware of how his or her assumptions and values can influence how progress is perceived in the coaching agenda, and how the agenda of other stakeholders in the coaching programme can overshadow what progress means from the client’s perspective.

Coaches are increasingly under pressure to prove that coaching interventions are successful. Sponsors of the coaching programme, who are external to the coaching relationship, often have their own sets of indicators and measures by which they assess the progress that has been made. The coach may face a situation in which progress is being defined by multiple criteria and where there may be conflict regarding how signs of progress should appear. From the perspective of the coach, this can be seen as problematic presenting the coach with several dilemmas. This is conceptualised in the diagram below (Figure 1). It shows how every factor at each point of the triangle can be affected by each of the other factors, with the coach in the middle having to deal with the issues that arise.

Figure 1 - The Coach’s Dilemma (adapted from Prescott, 2009)



The coach’s dilemma is how to ascertain what the client defines as progress, whilst being aware that the definition of progress may be directly influenced by an external agency such as a sponsor or, indirectly, through societal factors that can manifest themselves in the client’s or the coach’s values and hidden assumptions. In order to explore this dilemma more

fully, current research was examined for empirical evidence in relation to the following research questions:

1. Whose definition of progress is involved in the coaching process?
2. What are the indicators of progress?
3. What are the dilemmas and controversies that the coach experiences?
4. What feelings does the coach experience and how do these influence how the coach works?

Literature Review

A literature review confirmed that there is no empirical coaching literature that deals explicitly with progress as a subject in its own right and this helped to clarify why research on progress and coaching is needed and how it would add value. The existing empirical research that mentions progress does so as an auxiliary matter and is mainly business based with a focus on return on investment (ROI) or stakeholder issues (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003, Feggetter, 2007, Parker-Wilkins, 2006). In this context progress is viewed from an economic perspective. Examining progress from this business perspective is worthwhile since doing so reveals who is involved in deciding what progress means in the coaching programme in this context, as well as some of the controversies that a coach may have to deal with.

Research into strengths coaching (Linley & Harrington, 2006) found that the client's goal for progression might conflict with the organisation's goal of client progress. Linley, Woolston and Biswas-Diener (2009, p.43) avow that sometimes the result of the organisation deciding the agenda is "stultifying mediocrity" that results in "marginal performance increase". Furthermore, Bachkirova and Cox (2005) point out that if the client needs to develop in a direction that is in conflict with the organisational direction then this could not only restrict the progress of the client but also the scope of the coaching and its ability to help the client progress. Under these circumstances coaches may well find themselves in a difficult situation, trying to manage several different agendas and competing needs and having to show ROI according to those agendas.

Coaches also need to be aware of how their own agenda may influence the process to the detriment of client and/or organisation, for example, as Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck (1999) suggest, by promoting a particular process model of management. Askeland (2009, p.73) argues that the coach influences the whole process "by asking questions, the coach not only directs the conversation, he/she *influences* what emerges as an answer". This view resonates with Laske's (2004, p.42) assertion that coaches "insinuate their own processes into client's present mental-emotional make-up".

The idea of using indicators to prove that progress has been made and that the coaching programme is effective, is appealing in business as a way of proving that such programmes have provided value for money and increased business profits (Dagley, 2006; Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006; McGovern *et al.*, 2001). However, relying solely on behavioural indicators or on one approach for indicators of progress may lead to misinterpretation about what the indicator is actually showing. Research by Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006) and Thach (2002) found difficulty proving that it was coaching alone that led to the progress that clients made after 360

degree feedback. These studies would suggest that indicators of progress may not become immediately apparent during the lifespan of the coaching, and that even if they do, they may not be attributable to coaching alone.

Anderson's (2008) case study of leadership coaching demonstrates how including the intangible as well as the tangible benefits of coaching opens up the possibility for using indicators that are less narrowly defined. Ongoing research by the OECD (2009) confirms that various countries are conceptualizing progress in terms of indicators of happiness, well-being and life-satisfaction, whilst Hamilton's (2006, p.278) meta-map proposes the use of Wilber's (2006) integral map to examine how values can be used across all levels of society to produce a common set of indicators that can meet individual as well as national and global needs.

Coaches can employ an adult development perspective to identify indicators of developmental progress that might be otherwise overlooked due to a lack of understanding of developmental progression. However, it might be wise for coaches to bear in mind Bachkirova and Cox's (2007) concern that the coach needs to be careful not to use a developmental agenda to change the focus of the coaching sessions. The point they raise is an interesting one, especially as coaches bring their own values and assumptions to the coaching relationship. How coaches look for and interpret indicators of progress is very much affected by the lens through which they see the world.

I suggest there is a particular need for research to be carried out into indicators of progress in a community context as there is an absence of research on community coaching. Emery and Flora (2006) who undertook research in America, found that coaching approaches had a positive effect on increasing social capacity and community regeneration when combined with a range of different measures designed to support the community. The wide range of indicators the research used helps to build a broader perspective of the ways in which progress can be indicated and a better understanding of the factors that may affect progress.

A literature review found that research is needed to supplement the coaching profession's knowledge of how coaches understand and navigate their way successfully through the complexity of progress in the coaching process. The literature has also indicated that there may be several stakeholders in the coaching programme and that this can create dilemmas for the coach, especially when these agendas conflict. Much of the empirical coaching research to date on indicators of progress has been from a business perspective and, this is mainly based on economic definitions of progress, which can be limited in their scope. This study aimed to show that other arenas in which coaching is used, such as community and life coaching, can also provide valuable evidence of and insight into progress and coaching.

Methodology

An heuristic study was chosen as an approach that would focus on the experiences of the coach; discovering how coaches experience their "work as coaches on a personal level" (Linley, 2006, p.5); and how coaches use themselves as "an instrument of knowing" (Allcorn, 2006, p.129) to help the client progress. There was also an opportunity within this research to capture the "tacit dimension" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p.50), the sense of knowing something before it can be articulated, which I felt would be a valuable part of discovering the

coach's experience. In researching the coach's experience, I thought it necessary, to find an approach that would "retain the essence of the person in the experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p.43). Using the researcher's own data was one way to achieve this.

Consequently, other phenomenological approaches were rejected on the grounds that they might miss out a layer of complexity that the study had the potential to offer through the inclusion of insights from my experiences as the researcher. This is consistent with Linley's (2006) assertion for the need for further empirical research to provide an understanding of the coach's inner world and Hiles's (2001, p.1) belief that including the experience of the researcher is important because of its ability to increase "our knowledge of some of the most significant and exciting aspects of human experience". Compared with other phenomenological approaches, heuristic inquiry offers great flexibility with regard to data gathering, and at the same time a high degree of rigor and discipline. These were important considerations in achieving the research objective: the coach's experience. Flexibility and freedom to choose suitable methods of data gathering meant, for example, that I was able to have further dialogue with a number of the co-researchers with respect to a new perspective that had emerged.

The research study was epistemologically located in the interpretivist paradigm, because this particular paradigm "is informed by a concern to understand...the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p.28), and this best served the research objective of discovering coaches' lived experiences. Ontologically, the study focused on the nature of reality from the perspective of lived experience taking the position that there are multiple realities in existence.

The study employed the framework created by Moustakas (1990) that sets out each phase for carrying out the heuristic investigation:

- initial engagement - how the question to be studied emerges,
- immersion – the researcher focuses in on the question and study,
- incubation – the researcher takes time out from thinking about the question,
- illumination – new insights occur in this phase,
- explication – the researcher analyses the data for meanings,
- creative synthesis – all the experiences, learning and common themes are drawn together.

Eleven coaches took part in the study, two male and nine female. The coaching experience of the participants varied from two to twenty years, and the coaches themselves came from a variety of backgrounds: business, community development, human resources, science, health and education. They represented several different genres of coaching: executive, business, team, performance, career, life, developmental and community. Thus, a purposeful sampling strategy was employed (Creswell, 2007) for the selection of the 'co-researchers'. In accordance with the study's approach, all were practising coaches from different backgrounds who had experienced the phenomenon.

Co-researchers were asked whether the initial interviews could be followed up with further dialogue if new issues arose; in addition a focus group was used to facilitate deeper

exploration of some of the emergent issues. Email was used to provide flexibility in gathering feedback for one specific issue. This is consistent with heuristic inquiry, as “it permits shifts in methods according to the vagaries of experience” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p.45) as long as there is relevance to the research. Once all the interviews had been carried out, I was interviewed by another co-researcher. This enabled a comparison of this data and the other data collected throughout the process using a reflective diary, drawings and metaphorical images. Silverman (2005, p.240) says that although interviews are seen as the “gold standard” of data collection in qualitative research, they are “fundamentally concerned with the environment around the phenomenon rather than the phenomenon itself”. In addition, in asking the co-researchers to use a metaphor or image that encapsulated their experience of helping the client progress, and combining that with asking them about their feelings, the intention was to put the focus on “lived” experience of the phenomenon. Using metaphors helped uncover hidden knowledge during the data analysis phase.

Data Analysis

The data was first collected from the interviews that had been transcribed. The transcriptions were sent to the co-researchers who checked them for accuracy and made any amendments they felt necessary. Each transcript was then read and notes made in the margins. Key points and quotes were picked out by highlighting them. These key points and quotes were transferred to a separate sheet and examined according to emerging themes. The metaphor that each coach had chosen was, where possible, presented diagrammatically in the middle of another sheet of paper, where it was then used as the central focus for the emergent mind map. I used mind maps as a way of organising the themes and being able to look at them from a more objective position. The mind maps were used in conjunction with the written transcriptions and original recordings to ensure that nothing had been missed. This was done several times throughout the analysis process. During the next stage of data analysis the themes from each co-researcher were cross referenced and entered into a spreadsheet so as to identify overarching themes. This is similar to the “thematic matrix” that Moustakas (1990, p.50) describes. These themes were then discussed with a focus group. The thematic clusters that had emerged from the data were then compared and contrasted with the findings from the literature review with a view to ascertaining if new knowledge was emerging from the findings.

Findings and Discussion

Three main themes arose from the data analysis process:

- i) Whose agenda?
- ii) Indicators and paradoxes of progress
- iii) The coach’s experience

i) Whose Agenda

The theme ‘Whose Agenda’ relates to the different stakeholders who have either a direct or indirect interest in the coaching programme as they pursue their own agendas. These agendas, which may be explicit or implicit in nature, can reveal the power relationships that determine the meaning of progress within a coaching context. This theme emerged from the data analysis as having a significant impact on the coach’s experience of helping the client

progress and raised important questions with regard to whose definition of progress was being used in each coaching relationship. External influences on the coaching relationship included, for example, the sponsor of the coaching programme and other stakeholders, who had a preconceived idea of what progress meant and an expectation of the outcome. This definition was not necessarily the same as the client's or the coach's and at times this created a dilemma for the coach.

One co-researcher talked of a coaching relationship she experienced in which there were two main stakeholders "sitting in the background" (CR6), a government agency and another organisation. These stakeholders were sponsoring the coaching programme and so wanted to set the agenda and the outcomes of the programme. As a consequence this co-researcher experienced the dilemma of having to tell the client that the agenda and parameters had already been set prior to the onset of the coaching, "This is your agenda; what would you like to talk about?" (CR6). This presented the coach (CR6) with several dilemmas; whether or not to help the client to meet their needs, should they differ from the organisational agenda, addressing the issue of whether the main stakeholders intended to use the coaching to the detriment of the client, and how to deliver value as a coach whilst maintaining an ethical responsibility to the client (Bachkirova & Cox, 2005; Spence, Cavanagh & Grant, 2006; Sugarman, 1992).

Evidence from another co-researcher aptly illustrates how dealing with these dilemmas requires careful contracting with the stakeholders at the start of the process, to ensure sufficient flexibility to allow the client's needs to be addressed:

...you just waiver a bit as a coach depending on how the work's been commissioned, between proving to the organisation that you've done a really good job and ticked all the boxes on the original contract that you put together, and really focusing on the individual...I think that when you do the contracting at the beginning you have to be very careful that you're not a slave to that and you can word it in ways so that there are generic type objectives that the organisation is looking for. I think that's quite a tension though (CR7).

This coach's experience confirms the concerns of Spence *et al* (2006) assertion, that coaches have a duty of care towards their clients encompassing both their health and well being. It also speaks to the reality of the context in which a coach operates, that there is not necessarily the same freedom to pursue a client's agenda that a counsellor may have (Bachkirova & Cox, 2005) and that even the "seasoned coaches" that Wasylyshyn, Gronsky and Haas (2006, p.74) talk of, find this situation challenging, as it is not always possible to satisfy all parties.

One way in which the tension surrounding whose agenda will define what progress means in coaching, can be seen in the case of client/clients expressing a desire to leave the organisation. One co-researcher (CR1) explained that a situation would sometimes arise where clients were making progress, however the manifestation of that progress was that they then wanted to leave the company. Another coach (CR7) offered a different perspective on the meaning of progress from an organisational perspective, whereby the organisation actually wants the client to be coached to leave. However, this may not be what the client wants. Both these cases highlight the responsibility on the part of the coach to ensure that both client and

coach are aware of other stakeholder agendas, so that the parameters of the coaching relationship can be clearly defined.

Evidence from several coaches indicates that some organisations “can almost coerce clients to behave in particular ways” (CR4). One co-researcher referred to this coercion as a ‘sheep dip’ (CR6). If the coach is working within such an organisational culture it may be difficult to align the reality of what is happening to the clients with the codes of conduct and ethics of the professional body to which the coach belongs. Here lies an issue, that I posit, has not been fully addressed, namely how professional associations demonstrate a duty of care whilst also supporting their members. The coaching profession could play a role in helping to encourage organisations to “evolve towards being...learning and development culture[s]” because these have been found to be the cultures that encourage the growth of the client (Boyatzis, Smith & Blaize, 2006; De Vries, 2008; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007).

Client's Agenda

For the client to have the opportunity to grow within the coaching relationship, the coach must first establish what progress means to the client. This is not necessarily straightforward as sometimes the client does not reveal their true personal agenda, either at the start or later in the coaching. The coach can find that, “the declared agenda is not the real agenda...it's not necessarily something that you can look at from the contracting issues and what is declared at that stage” (CR4). Perhaps the client may feel afraid or wary of being open because their agenda may conflict with the agendas of other parties involved in the coaching programme. Co-researcher (CR11) found that the client wanted to please her and so it was difficult to ascertain the client's real agenda. This coach used the metaphor of a tightrope to illustrate the precarious nature of coaching, where the coach is involved in the “continual reconstruction of deciding what is right” (Sugarman, 1992, p.23).

Coach's Agenda

The issue of how the coach's agenda and definition of progress could affect the coaching relationship was topical for all the coaches. One coach felt quite strongly that it was a “contamination of the client's coaching experience” (CR4), a view which supports Askeland's (2009, p.66) argument, of “how greatly the coach influences the client”. The fact that all the coaches were aware of their power to influence the coaching process, may suggest that Askeland's (2009, p.66) assumption that “power dynamics are rendered invisible by current ways of thinking”, is not always true. The idea that the coach's agenda could steer the whole process was a motivating factor behind the drive to understand what progress means from the client's perspective: “I still think it's really important that it is progress in their eyes and it's not just me trying to take them somewhere that I think they should go” (CR9). As Jackson (2008, p.75) remarks, “examining the foundations and assumptions of their own practice” helps coaches to develop awareness and flexibility, so as to ensure that the power is equally shared between the coach and the client.

ii) Indicators and Paradoxes of Progress

Depending on whose definition of progress and whose agenda takes preference, different indicators of progress will be sought as evidence, and the coach will need to know what signs to look for and where to find them. The study found one key factor which distinguished the experienced coach from the novice was confidence in trusting their intuition.

One less experienced coach reported that, “I questioned my gut feeling...in the end I think my gut feeling was right but I didn’t trust it and didn’t listen to it” (CR3).

A fascinating theme that emerged from the findings was the paradoxical nature of indicators. One example of this is where the coach sees no sign of progress in the coaching relationship and may conclude that the client is not progressing. One co-researcher described such a situation “I can remember feeling quite concerned...about the fifth session, [and thinking] ‘we’re not going anywhere here’” (CR9). The line manager similarly voiced concerns that no signs of progress were evident. However, these indicators did not accurately reflect what was happening from the client’s perspective, as this internal process was hidden from the coach. The co-researcher confirms that not only was the progress happening internally for the client, even though it was not visible to the coach, but it was happening outside of the sessions. The co-researcher described how soliciting feedback from the client on what was happening “gave me that window into what was going on inside him” (CR9). The co-researcher’s learning from this experience was that, definitions of progress “very much depend on [the client]” (CR9).

Another paradox exists where the coach sees many indicators of progress but the client does not recognise these indicators as signs of progress. When I asked one of the co-researchers if it could be termed progress if the client did not recognise it as progress, she replied that if the client did not recognise it then “It isn’t in their [client’s] eyes” (CR10), and this was why it was vital to show the client regular evidence of their progress.

The evidence from this study has shown that indicators are open to interpretation as evidence of progress or lack of progress depending on who is performing the interpretation. This is significant in light of the findings around “Whose Agenda”, as it implies that indicators are not agenda free. It is possible that triangulating the indicators might help to balance the latent power and agenda issues of those identifying the indicators, especially where there are stakeholders who “may have some axe to grind” (Wasylyshyn, 2003, p.97). It emerged from the literature review that there are power dynamics to consider in the coaching relationship and having found evidence of them in the current study, Hay’s (2007, p.118) model is a useful way of considering these dynamics from a perspective of “psychological distances”. This can be beneficial in the context of a life coaching setting; for example, one client reported to a coach that his wife had observed signs of progress (CR9). This triangulation of evidence can also help the coach to be aware of the psychological investment that a friend or family member may have in the coaching process.

iii) *The Coach’s Experience*

The experience of helping the client to progress was conceptualised through the use of metaphors, which for Stein (2003), are an important way of revealing the inner world. There are interesting contrasts between some of the metaphors, which reveal the coach’s attitudes and feelings towards the coaching relationship. For example, one coach saw herself as a “thoughtful bystander” (CR6). This metaphor suggests a somewhat detached approach to the coaching relationship; and this is further borne out by this coach talking about the “degree of loneliness” as a coach because the relationship with the client is:

always one step removed, you can’t get down there and experience the same thing...
you can’t feel it with them like you can with a colleague (CR6).

As a result the coach did not share her feelings with the client:

I'm a very empathetic person and it would be easy to get right down there with them and feel their feelings, so I use my feelings in a different way, I reign them in and I hold them back (CR6).

This would appear to be in direct contrast to De Haan's (2008a) supposition that everything that a coach feels is relevant to the client. I suggest that in practice, achieving a balance between "reigning in" feelings and sharing feelings is a difficult challenge for any coach and a potential cause of tension in the coach/client relationship. I think there is legitimacy in Marshall's (2001, p.131) assertion that metaphors can reveal "inconsistencies between stated beliefs and the implicit framework on which their actions are based". This sense of tension and detachment must surely make it difficult for coach and client to achieve the congruence and the "collaborative partnership" that Passmore and Gibbes (2007, p.125) found to be most beneficial to client and coach.

On the other hand, a certain lack of congruence can actually motivate the coach to challenge the client. CR2 used feelings of disappointment to challenge a client and even put the whole relationship in jeopardy, despite this being alien to his "please people" drivers (Hay, 2007). By taking this risk the coach was able to help the client to progress and went on to describe it as "a really successful piece of work" (CR2). This evidence supports De Haan's (2008a) assertion that if the coach can contain their feelings and use them in the coaching relationship, this has the potential to deepen the relationship and in this way it can be seen that everything that the coach feels is relevant to the client and metaphors can help to reveal some of those unexpressed feelings.

Use of the metaphor "chill room" (CR2) suggests that the coach helps to facilitate a space in the coaching in which congruence and rapport can emerge. Inside this "chill room" the coach is able to help the client reconnect with an authentic self and "collect their thoughts", by removing the pressure that accompanies constant assessment and measurement of progress that "can almost freeze a leader in the headlights of data and feedback...and stop progress" (CR2). This co-researcher was clear that this benefitted the coach too:

I have this big belief that actually the reason you coach is because it does something for yourself. I would be disingenuous if I say that I only coach for the benefit of my client, because I actually coach for my own benefit...so that chill room is definitely my chill room as well as my client's chill room (CR2).

That coaches may benefit from coaching is a significant finding, as there appears to be no empirical research that deals with this issue. Other coaches in this study also described how coaching benefited them. I contend that the benefits that the coaches talk of gaining from coaching raise an important issue regarding how coaches ensure that their needs do not take precedence over the client's needs. Hawkins and Shohet (2006, p.13) maintain that "it is not the needs themselves, but their denial that we believe can be so costly" and if this is true then it is vital for the coach to be aware of these needs and how they may manifest themselves with regard to the issue of progress and the client's perspective.

Limitations

This research, like any other at master's level, was time-bound. With more time it would have been possible to look longitudinally at the effects of coaching on the coaches and whether or not their metaphors changed, by carrying out subsequent sequenced interviews with them. Another limitation of this study was that it was carried out on a small scale; with more resources it would be useful to extend it, for example, to include more co-researchers representing each field of coaching. This could in turn have offered the opportunity to have more focus groups. A further restriction was that the coaches were mainly drawn from similar backgrounds. It would be useful to see what results from a similar study involving other cultures with different coaching approaches. Additionally, a further possible method of triangulating the data and adding more depth would have been to use a focus group of the co-researchers' clients.

Conclusion

A key theme emerging clearly from the empirical data of this study is that clarifying and negotiating all the different stakeholder definitions of progress poses a huge challenge for the coach. The findings show that the different stakeholders in the coaching programme use various means in pursuit of their agendas, whether in a business or community setting. Often, in a business context it would appear that the agenda is set for the client before the coaching commences. It is clear from the findings that this can present the coach with several dilemmas. Whilst the contracting process offers a way to anticipate and head off some of these issues, what was very clear from both the findings and the literature review was that coaches, irrespective of level of experience, are often under great pressure to meet the agendas of all parties. This is not always feasible, or indeed desirable, regardless of the experience level of the coach.

It may be concluded that the coaching profession is in a key position to raise questions about whether the definitions of progress, especially from an organisational perspective are realistic and meaningful. The coaching profession could help to re-envision what progress means in a more integral way. The data demonstrates that coaches give serious attention to the duty of care they feel for the client and do so in, the face of ever increasing pressure to prove that progress is happening. A re-evaluation of what duty of care means for the coach is called for. A key policy conclusion I draw is that, coaching bodies need to consider their active responsibility to support coaches more fully, through demonstrating in practice their willingness to take the lead on suggesting best practice to deal with the controversial and ethical issues that their coaches face, as well as communicating those issues to organisations whose culture has a detrimental emotional effect on the client and coach.

The main conclusion that can be drawn regarding indicators of progress is that they can be paradoxical in nature. This means that they are sometimes open to misinterpretation, especially by different stakeholders who tend to view them within the framework of their own particular agenda. Given Akerloff's (1976, p.600) caution that "the indicators by which men judge each

other may warp their values and distort their goals”, it would seem important to find a method for allowing different interpretations to be equally valued.

Triangulating evidence of indicators is one such method and it can be a useful way to use these different frameworks to establish the quality and extent of progress. This is a technique that can be used in life coaching and community coaching settings, as well as in a business context. Indicators may not appear within the lifespan of the coaching programme, which in turn can make it difficult to prove that the progress a client makes is in fact due to the coaching programme. The coaching profession needs to give fuller consideration to this operational challenge, in an environment where both the private and public sectors are fixated on demonstrable, near term results.

The coach is uniquely placed to identify certain indicators such as developmental ones and communicate these to clients and organisations who may be unaware them, especially intangible indicators that may have been harder to identify. A lesson that emerges from this study is that it is very important for all parties to be able to see when progress is happening. Further research on identifying ways in which progress can be made more visible and intelligible to both clients and businesses is recommended.

One unexpected lesson that emerged from this study was the parallel between community and executive coaching. The findings evidenced that some executive clients and some community clients were under enormous pressure. Even though the source of the pressure is completely different, the concept of people being “frozen” is comparable and this pressure sometimes impacted on the coach. A recommendation from this research is that more consideration be given to how coaching cultures can be embedded in other settings, such as government-sponsored community programmes or third sector organisations, and what would be the best principles and practice of doing so.

The findings established that coaches benefit from coaching, and that progress is symbiotic. Tackling issues of progress and further research into these benefits and coaches’ conceptions of progress could inform the development of more effective training and supervision programmes to help coaches develop their practice and equip coaches with a good and evolving “toolkit” (De Haan, 2008b).

The worldwide debate on what progress means is leading to new definitions as countries re-evaluate the implications of definitions that were originally predominantly defined by economic measures and use the opportunity to broaden these definitions to include indicators of well-being. The Global Convention on Coaching (Rostron, 2009, p78) set up working parties to look at ethics worldwide, with a view to establishing how coaching can “positively impact on the individual, the family, organisational and government culture and society as a whole”. I think that this is a significant step that brings with it the potential for coaching to connect with the global debate on progress. I believe that coaching has the potential to do this and the time has now come for the coaching profession to adopt a significant role in helping to create new definitions of progress that challenge Russell’s view and truly sustain society.

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