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Discipline, profession and industry - how our choices shape our future

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**Abstract**

At the time of writing the practice of coaching is definitely an industry, could be underpinned by a discipline but is yet to be a profession. The current situation is fluid and dynamic. It is evolving as choices are made by practitioners, researchers, Universities and nascent professional bodies. Whether coaching ends up as a chartered profession in its own right, a sub-discipline of psychology, education, or a professional practice of Human Resource Management will have a significant impact on the conduct of the work itself and how it is understood. The status of coaches will to a large extent be determined by their autonomy, influence and perceived value to clients. This chapter examines the implication of an increasingly professionalised practice of coaching and what this means for coaches either as sole practitioners or employees and the expectations that clients can have of the increasingly professional coach.

Our analysis draws first upon the sociology of professional work particularly that of Evetts (2013) on the analysis of professional work and the concepts of profession, professionalization and professionalism. We compare coaching with the experience of other areas of practice such as nursing, consulting and social care as they too seek to differentiate their work. Having considered the professional perspective we then turn to the concept of coaching as an academic discipline in part drawing on the constructs developed by Foucault (1975) and others. This analysis highlights how the trends in an increasingly professional coaching practice will have impact upon the work and specifically the issue of alleviation of risk. This brings into focus the ethical aspects of the intervention requiring both scrutiny of standards and regulation with an inherent requirement for

qualification. There is also the highly political question of who determines what epistemology is appropriate for the body of knowledge. This question has been robustly debated by amongst others Fillery-Travis & Passmore (2011) and Corrie (2014). The divergent opinion in the literature exists, in part, due to the varying backgrounds of the coaches who seek to apply to coaching research the same criteria for rigor they used in their original discipline. The 'ownership' of the body of knowledge is thus critical in determining what research strategy is followed and what evidence is produced and by whom. The answer to these issues determines what questions are or are not asked and therefore how coaching evolves.

The list above contains a number of the essential elements that identify a practice to be a profession or a discipline. They have been previously considered by Hawkins (2008), Cavanagh and Grant (2004), Lane (2014) as well as within a recent history by Stec (2012) but this chapter extends the analysis to first consider the place of professions within the organizational context and then within the wider context of the professions in general and the emergent ones specifically. This will allow the coaching practitioner and our associations a framework to consider and plan for the potential challenges of the future and hence design both their individual and collective development.

**Introduction**

‘The coach began as a technology used for transportation, evolved into an object that was associated with a type of status and then becomes a prominent character in sport, before ultimately becoming an influential management concept.’ (Stec 2012 p331)

This historian of coaching makes the rather tongue-in-cheek comment as he seeks to identify the tensions inherent in exploring the professional and scientific legitimacy of the occupation. At the time of writing the practice of coaching is definitely an industry, could be underpinned by a discipline but is yet to be a profession. Each of these concepts; profession, industry (practice), trade or discipline carry with them the associated ‘badge’ of varying professional or academic status’ and with it the rights to authority, autonomy and high remuneration/resources for its practitioners or scholars (Grant and Cavanagh (2004) . The stakes are high and there are a number of perspectives on the issues (Grant, 2006; Stern, 2004); Fillery-Travis and Passmore (2011) to reference just a few of the review articles contributing to the debate.

Where, in the spectrum of occupational forms from trade to profession, the occupation of coaching will eventually be placed, is not clear. There is no requirement or necessity for it to progress from a trade or service industry to the perceived lofty heights of a profession. It may be that maintenance of coaching as a service provision underpinned by a growing discipline will be sufficient for the industry to flourish and develop. Indeed there is an opinion that the post war stampede by trades for professional status has been overplayed

and in fact a number of trades have proudly stood by their status (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011). There is also the issue of professionalism where the cult of the amateur has persisted (Cunningham 2008) and occupations like architects bemoaned the 'loss of art' (Gerstenblith 1994). Indeed there has been some identification of coaching as simply a sub-role or activity of other professions and therefore with no separate identity as a profession. Hamlin (2008) suggests that coaching is a significant part of modern Human Resource Development practice and as pointed out by Gray (2010) the American Society for Training and Development and the UK-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development both agree with the identification of coaching as being part of the role of the HRD professional.

A parallel debate is being enacted within the academy concerning the notion of whether coaching is a discipline. There are a number of reviews reflecting upon the growing body of knowledge and whether it is of sufficient coherence, unique perspective and maturity to delineate it as that of a 'discipline' (Kampa Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Fillery-Travis and Passmore, 2011; Krishnan, 2009); Cox et al. (2014). Can coaching be a full discipline in its own right or a sub-discipline of another more elite or established field of study? Is it a nascent discipline in the space between more established disciplines? Although the whole concept of disciplinarity sits within the academic realm (with the specific role as a educational device) there is a common misconception that a discipline must have an associated profession and vice versa (Krishnan, 2009). This is clearly not the case and a moments reflection identifies three types of pairing of discipline and profession: discipline exists before profession (history) and can exist separate from it, discipline and profession

completely locked (medicine), disciplines and profession are linked but NOT required by either (a spectrum exists here from accountancy to Chemistry). The identification of where the coaching body of knowledge sits in terms of academic 'tribes' (Becher 2001) is however critical to how the practice evolves. This positioning will determine what knowledge is deemed legitimate and appropriate to the field, how it is created and by whom. In effect it determines what questions are deemed suitable for research and hence how coaching will evolve (Fillery-Travis and Corrie, 2015).

As authors we represent the two distinct communities involved in this debate- academia and high-level practice. This allows us to consider how these issues influence both communities as we seek to explore how the labels of profession and/or discipline and their responsibilities and advantages will influence the evolution of coaching in the medium to long term. In the following chapter we ask what is the current status of coaching within each realm, what are the possible routes for development, their advantages and dilemmas and how this will impact upon both the coaching and the client. Figure 1 provides a map of our key considerations for each concept. We turn first to the notions of trade, craft and industry as a precursor to the consideration of what is a profession. This is particularly important as becoming a profession is often considered as the only positive outcome for an occupation. Once it is established how coaching aligns within or between those options we will consider the body of knowledge that underpins the practice of coaching and whether this a discipline itself, or whether it can contribute as a sub-discipline to a larger field or if it can be a generic contribution to a number of separate occupations. We then reflect upon

coaching's current position and armed with such critiques continue to speculate on the development routes open to the coaching occupation.

### **Coaching as Industry, Trade or Craft**

Industries, Trades and Crafts have been recognised since the Middle Ages and their organisation has grown and developed continuously and organically from these roots. Originally regulation was not at the national level but provided locally within cities (Chicherov, 1971). A good example is the City of London, which provided the status of Freeman to those practicing a trade or craft allowing them to operate within the City free of any feudal lord (Hickson 1991). Similar systems operated throughout Europe (Epstein 1998) where crafts and trades were organised by Guilds or Livery Companies formed by experienced practitioners, governed by a Master and Court and to which membership was gained by “servitude” i.e. apprenticeship to a master craftsman but also by patrimony or redemption i.e. inheritance or payment (Ogilvie 2011). Such Guilds controlled both the supply of craftsmen and the standards to which they were trained. Thus they established a form of the “bargain” between skilled suppliers, customers and the city authorities that still endures today. This provided a degree of social and market closure (restriction of practice to those certified to undertake it) together with price protection, in return for guaranteed standards both of skill and honesty. In the extreme cases where the state, rather than the city, viewed the provision and standard of specific services as critical, they became formalised and regulated as the first professions. These were the Law, Medicine and the Church and practice of these professions was underpinned by a university -level education in the field, then a rarity unlike today (Delamont et al 2000).



A key distinction from the beginning between crafts and professions was this balance between academic learning and practical experience. For crafts the overwhelming emphasis was on experience and practical learning through apprenticeship, while in contrast for professions mastery of a significant high-level body of knowledge (as measured by independent examination) was additionally required. Indeed we contend it to be the risk to the client and/or the state, to their wealth, health or reputation that forced the formalisation (and hence regulation) of a profession. High value activity with low risk to the client, such as gold- or silver-smithing remained crafts with only the independent certification of the precious metal itself controlled by the state (Neal and Morgan 1998).

In the modern world surprising little has changed. Skilled practitioners, tradespeople and craftsmen still seek to be recognised by forming themselves into Trade Associations that represent their manufacturing, service or trading interests. These Associations lobby, at the national level or even international level, for regulations and market structures that favour their members in return for promoting standards and ethics. They set codes of conduct and standards for their members, provide training, guarantee work and champion best practice.

The most striking change in the twentieth century has been the explosion in the variety of these skilled occupations; particularly new services, driven by expanding technological and managerial sophistication and underpinned by technical and occupational training (Hagen, 2012). Furthermore this expansion has produced two new classes of occupation or practice that differ from the traditional 'blue collar' crafts in a number of ways. Firstly there has been the emergence of specialised service based practices delivered by "artisan" knowledge workers: trainers,

facilitators, project managers, management consultants, quality assessors etc. In addition there has been the emergence of “assistant professionals”: paralegals, paramedics, scientific and engineering technicians (Mackey and Nancarrow, 2005). The situation is made slightly more complex by the fact that existing professionals often choose to deliver the specialist practice themselves, i.e Accountants often deliver management consultancy, or Engineers act as their own project managers. However this does not make such practices a profession in their own right.

Coaching as an industry clearly possesses all the attributes required for a modern service based managerial craft. It requires both the acquisition of technical knowledge and the use and development of practical interpersonal skills (Forum, 2012). Associations such as EMCC, WABC, ICF and the AC provide training accreditation and define ethics and codes of practice. Managers and leaders now often acquire the coaching skill set and act formally as coaches within their own organisations (Batson and Yoder, 2012; Gregory and Levy, 2011; Forum, 2012; Wenzel, 2001). As management becomes increasingly professionalised there is an increasing need for them to acquire formal certification and academic qualifications. This is illustrated by the increasing numbers of Masters programmes in this area specifically within Australia and UK and the extent of research being conducted by those undertaking Doctoral degrees (Grant and Cavanagh, 2004). An interesting observation is the emergence of first degrees in coaching - specifically sports coaching for example in Canada (Demer, Woodburn, & Savard 2006) where given the short span of a sporting career, the potentially high rewards at risk and the central role of the coach may well force full professionalisation earlier than for business and executive coaches.

Indeed as a managerial craft business and executive coaching still has room to develop. Coaching associations are not yet influential enough with national and international governmental organisations to achieve the regulation needed for a degree of market and social closure. The risk to business of a number of poor coaches in the market may not be sufficient for government or regulators to take action. If it is, or becomes so, we would expect to see this first in the public sector where the need to demonstrate “good value for money” in public procurement may produce a NOCNOC (no certification no contract) situation as it has effectively for quality certification. There is some suggestion (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh and Parker 2010) that in the US and Australia there is a move for commercial and public organisations to require accreditation of coaches by ICF before hiring but as the authors point out this may be due to lobbying by ICF as opposed to full understanding of the range of practice quality.

A further interesting consideration is the development of the coaching craft’s body of knowledge, its codification and qualification against standards (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith (2015). This is a challenge also faced by a number of similar management craft areas, indeed some are very closely related. For example Coaching, Mentoring, Facilitating and Counseling, while very different in objectives and intent, share many underlying generic people-related skills. Does this mean that these crafts span more than one academic discipline or just that we have not yet crystallised the relevant pedagogies sufficiently at this stage? We will return to a number of these issues during the consideration of professional and discipline to which we now turn.

### **Consideration on the requirements for a coaching profession**

In this section we evaluate the occupation of coaching in terms of whether it can be considered a burgeoning profession or as a management craft used within other occupations. To do so we first consider what delineates a profession and how it evolves into being in effect the ‘natural history’ of professions within UK, Europe and US. This allows us to place coaching as a practice used by range of other professions. The evolution into a full profession may be hampered in the future as the level of risk associated with the occupation is relatively low and hence coaching lacks one of the main criteria to enable it to achieve market closure. This is also true of management consultancy.

### **What is a profession?**

The sociological analysis of professional work has differentiated professions and professionalism as a special means of organizing work and controlling workers; in contrast to the hierarchical, bureaucratic and managerial controls of industrial and commercial organizations’ (Everitt 2013).

The first theorists of professions (e.g. Pearson 1939) laid down a description of the characteristics of professional work and the professions that persists today. Held distinct from organisational employees in the way their work is organised or characterised the professional’s work is; specific, requires extensive training based on intellectual skill, involves apprenticeship socialisation into the community of practitioners who have a monopoly on the provision of the work (Goode 1969) and finally the work is of critical importance to the client. The attainment of such status for an occupation provides considerable claim to social standing for members and the

presumption of a degree of autonomy in exchange for self-regulation of training and ethical practice (Gilmore and Williams 2007). Practitioners can also claim high fees for their services in relation to the rarity of their knowledge and skill. In effect professionals have the expert knowledge and skills to solve their client's decision-making problems. As identified by Dietrich and Roberts (1997) 'professionalism has no economic basis if decision-making complexity does not exist' pp47. Professional work 'comes to be valued [through] the bounded rationality (Smith 1972) of potential clients when faced by important decisions' Gold, Rodgers and Smith (2002)

There is also an idea of service to community in the provision of professional services is part of the vision of many professional associations:

'There is a presumption that professional practice has an orientation towards the public good rather than narrow self-interest' (Gray 2011).

We could argue this to be a self-seeking assertion by the profession to justify their market closure.

The education and training of a professional is generally highly regulated requiring study at the level of higher education. The road to full competency is however identified as requiring significant experience of applying technical knowledge for a variety of issues within a range of contexts (Gold, Rodgers and Smith 2002). The development of sophisticated reflection capable of producing *phronesis* 'lies at the heart of professional mastery' and its attainment. Indeed such critical reflection is often the basis of professional chartering, fellowships and similar certifications (Kinsella & Pitman 2012).

Phronesis is an ancient Greek concept used by both Aristotle and Socrates to refer to a type of wisdom developed from practical consideration of other knowledges such as epistemie (logically developed knowledge) and sophia (often thought of as theoretical knowledge). Eraut (2000) considers this specifically in relation to professions: he identifies the propositional knowledge to be codified and passed to novices during training and tested in accreditation. Abstractions of this knowledge define the problems and tasks governed by the profession and the practical techniques used to address them (Abbott 1988). The second form of knowledge is situational and is built up over time by the individual within the field of practice. It is often tacit and based upon impressions of 'episodic memory' (Gold, Rodgers and Smith 2002). It forms the basis of the 'technically grounded extemporisation' that is the contribution of the professional beyond procedural or purely technical knowledge.

There have been a number of studies of how professions keep their status both socially and in the market place (Abbott 2014). This mainly operates through social and market closure as we identified previously (Abbott 1988). In this process the boundaries are sustained around the occupation as is

'the way that the members of professional groups routinely disparage members of related or competing groups' (Neal et al 2000 pp10)

Not wholly thought of as positive there is a school of thought that identifies this as:

'The process to pursue, develop and maintain the closure of the occupational group in order to maintain practitioners own occupational self-interests in terms of their salary, status and power as well as the monopoly protection of the occupational jurisdiction' (Larson 1977 pp45).

In all cases higher-level qualification is required for entry and this is perhaps the defining characteristic of a profession. Whether the gatekeeper regulating the qualification is a professional association or the state is of no import to its defining role. In addition the qualification cannot be by academic knowledge alone but requires some kind of monitored practical experience (e.g. articles). The professional association mostly maintains the qualification requirements but in general there will be an academic pathway that fulfils this requirement wholly or partly. This market and social closure is accepted on the basis that the risks (financial, physical, reputational or psychological) associated with the practice are such that practitioners need to be 'safe' or 'fit to practice' and carry appropriate insurance cover to protect their clients. Examples of new professions hitting this criteria are sports coaching where the financial and status risks can be very high and nursing where the redistribution of work between nurses and doctors has required nurses to perform higher risk and more complex tasks, i.e. to be fully professional.

### **Evolution of professions**

The 'natural history of professions' has been developed by Neal et al (2000) building upon the foundation of Morgan (1998) and Freidson (1983) and comparing the pattern of development of a range of professions in UK and Germany. They identified the staged route to full professional status in the UK as 'bottom up' whereas in Germany the state played an active interventionist role in a 'top down' process. In the 'bottom up' case most prevalent in non-mainland Europe the occupation becomes full time and an articles system is established. Professional associations are then formed conferring certification for the better-qualified or more prestigious practitioners. In this stage there may be several competing associations but in due course one emerges as the lead.

Qualifying examinations are then introduced often on a voluntary basis but this becomes mandatory for new members. There may be difficulties at this point as the experience-rich but lightly certificated seasoned practitioners start to compete with the well credentialed but less experienced newcomers to the occupation (Neal 2000).

At this point there begins the political agitation for legal protection of specific work areas for example in the UK a Royal Charter. This is usually driven through the professional association with the aim of protecting the area of work for its members. A case is made for a decrease in potential risk to the public and/or client with the use of suitably qualified professionals to provide the service. Usually the regulation is delegated to the leading professional body but there are instances where the risk is too great and/or the emerging profession is not able to provide such regulation. In this case statutory regulation is introduced as is being seen within the Health professions in the UK or more generally in Germany (Neal et al 2000). At this point there can also be a separation between the governing body and the professional body as in the General medical Council of the UK and the British Medical Association and similarly in the US with Health and Education. Academic routes to qualification are also established in co-operation with higher education authorities combined with some kind of practicum. The attainment of the degree provides significant exemption from the professional certification route. Negotiating such exemptions allows the professional association to control the curriculum content and the body of knowledge identified as being within the profession. This is non trivial and often used. The most famous example is the refusal of the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) in the UK to validate the Chemistry degree from Imperial College until relatively recently as Imperial failed to ensure all



fields of chemistry were taught in the final degree year. A requirement for CPD is introduced to ensure professionals continually update their skills and knowledge.

Thus in general professions are largely self-regulated and retain responsibility for professional education. Such responsibility is seen to operate most markedly by the new professions such as psychology who ruthlessly regulate the use of the term psychology in any degree title.

### **Where is coaching positioned now?**

There is significant resonance for us in the Neal et al analysis with the case of coaching as an emerging practice. If we were to compare the current direct line of travel for coaching there would be agreement that full time practitioners of coaching exist to some significant level (CIPD2013). Even the most recent economic difficulties and the constriction of the economy have not stopped the use of coaching within the organisational context (Jarvis, Lane and Fillery-Travis 2004). It has however shifted its delivery method from the high cost external practitioner to the lower cost internal coach and manager as coach (McComb 2012). This has split the emerging practice into independent practitioners operating a full time practice and employed part time staff.

There is also a range of coaching associations EMCC, WABC, ICF and others who are jostling for various sectors of the coaching market. These emerged in a bid to begin the social and market closure. Their early work concentrated upon delineating the unique forms of expertise required of their occupation (Eraut 1994) through the development of competency frameworks (EMCC). These were developed with varying degrees of robustness and have evolved into similar forms.

All the associations offer some individual accreditation against these frameworks at what is identified as a 'professional' level. There is a growing disquiet about such a methodology for assessment of coaches and also training programmes. Drake (2011) identifies that technical competency is not sufficient for a complex practice and takes the analysis further by drawing on the literature in expertise development, adult learning and evidence-based practice to offer a fresh perspective on the development of mastery in coaching. In doing so, he provides a new model of Mastery = Artistry + Knowledge + Evidence (MAKE). Bachkirova and Lawton Smith (2015) also make a spirited argument of the need to look beyond competency models as a basis for coach accreditation. Specifically the authors agree with Gavey 2011 that such approaches appear 'reductionist'. They quote Drake's rather beautiful phrase 'as novices they learn the rules, as intermediates they break the rules, as masters they change the rules and as artisans they transcend the rules' (2011 pp143). They suggest a capabilities approach would go beyond the 'closed and predetermined lists of competencies' and 'emphasis critical and reflective capabilities that allow the person to choose action and goals according to values and an evaluation of a wider external situation.' The work of de Haan et al (2011) further identifies that clients find the behaviour of most use from their coaches are 'listening, understanding and encouragement'. As Bachkirova et al (2015) identify 'one might wonder if all subsequent competencies are as critical as extensive competency frameworks suggest' pp129. The argument identifies the move to post-modernistic thinking with regard to a coaching curriculum and we will return to this later in this chapter when we consider disciplines.

The market response to such credentialing has been predictable with companies starting to seek to employ coaches with such a 'license' to practice (Bono 2009). This has also included

accreditation of coach training and the majority of coaching associations run such programmes allowing training providers to claim external standards of rigour. At the moment the criteria against which the courses are assessed are light on the curriculum requirements but with a focus on a significant practicum. Further development is on the agenda as we consider in the following section.

### **Professional associations**

Professional associations will also generally seek to maintain the autonomy of their profession, justifying this through their custodian-ship of the standards and ethical codes of practice (Williams and Anderson, 2006). Specifically they make the case that it is they who are best placed to make decisions on this practice over and above the claims from the state or from older and more established professions. We see some elements of this occurring with Health and Psychology professions (Williams 2010) in regard to coaching. The literature contains a number of studies proposing a need for psychology training for coaching practice (Sherman 2004) and in the US there has been some move to identify coaching with forms of therapy thereby requiring practitioners to have psychology credentials to practice. This is an example of the generic skills in common between coaching, mentoring, facilitation and counselling. At the moment coaching associations are holding such incursions into their perceived territory at bay with the explicit identification that coaches work with clients who are psychologically well and who want to work with coaches to fulfil their potential in their professional or personal lives. They argue that the work with their clients' needs to go beyond a purely psychological intervention. This overlap with other professions has encouraged the coaching associations to try to be explicit in identifying the boundaries of their work and where their members should operate. Grant et al

(2010) have also identified the active interest of some government bodies in developing coaching standards; e.g. Standards Australia although they also note the failure of Standards Norway to develop a standards framework citing the issue of industry fragmentation and immaturity (Ladegard 2008). Ethical codes are a specific example of such activity and although common throughout the coaching associations there is no explicit procedure for their imposition in any forum. A coach undertakes to abide by their association's ethical code of conduct as part of their membership but there are no standing committees to receive complaints from clients or to investigate membership concerns.

### **Profession or practice?**

This analysis identifies coaching as a specialised practice with a significant range of the qualities associated with a professional occupation such as specialisation, codes of ethics (although voluntary), practitioner associations offering accreditation of training and practice and higher level training and development. As a practice, coaching is used by a range of associated professions (HRD, psychology and education for example) to achieve individual and team learning objectives within their own practice contexts (Grant and Cavanugh 2007). It does however fail on one professional criteria - it has not achieved market closure. The coaching associations have had their individual credentialing programmes for some time but cannot make them obligatory for practice in the field. It is clear that the risk perceived by the client in this situation is concerned with quality of the provision not the safety of provision or its effectiveness to mitigate against some risk for the client. Hence while the value may be high the risk level can be thought of as low.

Some traction towards professional status has also been lost through the ICF choosing ISO standards as a benchmark within their system of certification (Gray 2011). Their use for an emerging practice seems to be contrary to an avowed direction of travel to professionalisation. This could be argued to indicate a lack of commitment to progression to professional status for the ICF and as such leads to a number of dilemmas for their member coaches in identifying where they see their practice positioned most authentically. The EMCC has taken the mantle of driving forward to professionalisation but it still falls short of requiring personal accreditation for membership. Which approach will dominate in the future remains to be seen.

The final stages of development are associated with the link with education (initial and continuing) and specifically the development of an academic route to qualification. As mentioned previously professional associations maintain control of the content of training through the training course accreditation but it is the level of such training that is a critical point in the discourse around professionalisation. These factors are in the realm of the development of an academic discipline and it is to this notion that we now turn.

### **Considerations on the requirements for a coaching discipline**

Within this section we consider whether coaching can be considered as a discipline. At first pass this may seem a more trivial question to that of professional status, but upon closer inspection the concept of discipline is ill defined and inconsistent in use. It is essentially a highly pragmatic classification of knowledge without a theoretical basis, which allows curricula to be taught in a purposeful manner (Messer-Davidow & Shumway1993). There are no established criteria beyond this, so in asking if there is a coaching discipline we are left to consider the possible factors without a sense of a defined framework. That being said we are clear that there must be a sufficiency of high level knowledge unique to coaching to constitute a discipline and to justify a higher education first degree in the area, although clearly there are already a number of Master degrees. Below we consider the coaching body of knowledge and the current research trajectory in the field. Consideration of these elements strongly suggests the body of knowledge intersects significantly with at least three other practices (counselling, facilitation and mentoring) leading to the suggestion that this body of knowledge is currently a sub-discipline but one that provides value to a range of other professions and as such is of specific merit.

### **What is a discipline?**

The concept of a discipline is one that people generally associate with an established and relatively stable body of knowledge that has been identified as robust and rigorous by a dedicated collection of academics trained to teach and research within this field of study. In reality disciplines are far more dynamic and indeed are...‘in continuously change...themselves’ fragmented and heterogeneous and which interact with other disciplines in many complex ways’ (Krishnan, 2009 pp5). In fact the OED definition is ‘a branch of learning or knowledge; a field of

study and experience; a subject' and what constitutes a branch of learning or knowledge is clearly up for debate. Julie Thompson Klein (1990) has pointed out that the academic discipline was an invention of the late Middle Ages and first applied to three academic areas for which universities had the responsibility of producing trained professionals: theology, law and medicine. She argues that this early 'disciplining' of knowledge was a response to external demands from the associated profession or vocation in contrast the specialisation into disciplines that emerged in the 19th century was due to internal drivers within academia i.e. the increase in size of the field of study and the need to segment it for effective teaching and research. In the time of Galileo and Newton natural philosophy was a single discipline (Shapin 1992). Later science and the pursuit of new knowledge had become an institutionalised and highly systematic endeavour and it became impossible to teach as a single subject. The response from the Universities was to divide it into the subject of chemistry, physic and biology; a process that was widely accepted and adopted (except for the University of Cambridge UK which persists in teaching a natural science tripos). Disciplinarily helped in the recruiting and production of the specialists that were needed in the context of the industrialisation and the advance of technology. As society grew in complexity in the late 19th and early 20th century a whole range of new disciplines were institutionally established including the main social sciences sociology; anthropology, psychology, political science and economics. Bourdieu and Bernstein remind us that 'the symbolic boundaries that define these disciplines are culturally arbitrary ...the array of academic disciplines is a matter of convention rather than a reflection of an inherent order.' (Bourdieu and Berstein pp14.) In essence the purpose of disciplines is to package knowledge in a convenient format for teaching students who will use it for their specific occupation, vocation or profession. New disciplines form in a process of fragmentation when their parent disciplines

become too bulky to be taught as a whole. There is no specific point when we can say a field of study has become a discipline but a new discipline cannot form unless it has ‘sufficient’ knowledge unique to the field.

With the developing knowledge economy it is perhaps not surprising that the number of disciplines is rising dramatically and at the last count there were over 8000 (EC 2014). Such a surfeit needs some classification system and the psychologist Anthony Biglan has developed one for disciplines according to the beliefs held about them by their members. It most generally divides disciplines into ‘hard’ or ‘paradigmatic’ disciplines and ‘soft’ or ‘pre-paradigmatic’ disciplines, which also points at the divide between natural sciences and humanities/social sciences. In addition, Biglan distinguishes between disciplines that are ‘pure’ or primarily theoretical (e.g. mathematics) and disciplines that are ‘applied’ (e.g. engineering), and thirdly, disciplines that engage with ‘living systems’ (e.g. biology) and those with ‘non-living systems’ (e.g. history). Generally speaking, the ‘hard’ natural scientists would be more respected within academia, be more focused on producing journal articles and enjoy a greater degree of social connectedness in their specialist field. In contrast, the ‘soft’ sciences are less respected and their practitioners more focused on teaching and publishing monographs and are far more loosely connected.

### **How do disciplines influence knowledge production?**

Before we consider how this ‘disciplining’ influences the evolution of coaching we will consider how knowledge production, dissemination and use are influenced by the way the discipline is constructed, positioned within academia and connected with a profession. The way each



discipline approaches the epistemic and ontological issues surrounding knowledge in its specific field of study is not generic but highly specific to the discipline (Ford 2010). This is a consequence of the nature of the questions asked in the field of the profession practice and the nature of the knowledge required by the practitioners. This was explored through the notion of paradigm as originally formulated by Kuhn (1962). He considered it to consist of a package of problems, techniques and examples that frame orthodox opinion. He considered progress in science as not a cumulative process as claimed both by the logical positivists and Popperians but rather a succession of scientific revolutions that from time to time fundamentally reorganise the field or discipline. Kuhn coined the term 'paradigm' to express the idea that disciplines are organised around certain ways of thinking or larger theoretical frameworks, which can best explain empirical phenomena in that discipline or field. Results that do not fit into the prevailing paradigm are somehow excluded, for example by limiting the domains of theories, or treated as anomalies the ongoing attempted resolution. Thus paradigms shape the questions scientists ask and also the possible answers they can get through their research. The discipline provides its members with identification (often tacit) of what is 'thinkable' (Fenge 2014), and what counts as knowledge, methodologies and research.

Once the problems with a prevailing paradigm become obvious (as too many exceptions remain unexplained) a new paradigm emerges that is able to explain more phenomena or be in some sense more efficient. There is clearly a dilemma (and one that Kuhn thought essential) with a struggle for stability and coherence of the body of knowledge (pedagogic stability Hacking 1992) with the requirement that it also constantly evolves. The theme is explored by Foucault in *Technologies of the Self* (Rainhow 1991) although he uses the term 'discipline' in a very general

and also fairly specific sense, it clearly includes the academic disciplines and their contributions to bringing about 'discipline' in society. His view is that disciplines have to be considered to be considerable barriers to free-thinking and an obstacle to more self-governed subjectivation. For him knowledge and power are linked and indeed

‘The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and conversely knowledge constantly induces effects of power’

This does not mean that power and knowledge are causally linked but more that each can only be understood in consideration of the other. As such the evolution of knowledge will be determined by the power system operating within the context in which the knowledge is created. Therefore, as we have identified previously, the dominant paradigm will exert power in the development of knowledge. Where there is a number of professions drawing upon a discipline the way that discipline evolves and the questions that can be asked will be determined by the dominant profession NOT by the most appropriate to practice or the most robust. Conversely, scholars drawing on a Foucauldian perspective have argued that professions are part of state governance structures, and experts play a role in defining, normalizing and regulating the population, and legitimating governance and power structures (Johnson, 1993; Pickard, 2010).

When questions or needs arise outside the realms of the established disciplines then multi- and inter-disciplinary work needs to be developed to address them (Collins and Fillery-Travis 2015). This type of work will be collaborative between the disciplines but with each maintaining their own disciplinary paradigm in response to the question. If such work provides viable and effective results in relation to this new type of questions and such questions are complex and important to a significant number of practitioners then new disciplines will emerge. This ‘push’

from professions, vocation, industry or state can result in dramatic change and this is identified in a number of the newer disciplines e.g. Nanochemistry. Some of the elite disciplines (such as philosophy) are exempt from such professional ‘interference’ and hence tend towards less discontinuity and haste in change (Krishnan 2009)

### **Is coaching a discipline presently?**

The emergence of coaching within the work environment (and personal sphere) is well documented and identifies the clear formation of a practice ahead of any disciplinary construct. The practice itself is clearly interdisciplinary drawing upon a range of disciplines (Cox, et al 2014). These include management, psychology, education and social sciences. As we discussed above all of these disciplines will be constructed through specific paradigms and hold separate perspectives and assumptions as to the development of human beings as well as holding different criteria for what constitutes knowledge. This provides an interesting challenge within interdisciplinary work in general; to provide an internally coherent output when the tools, methods or instruments are drawn from different paradigms (Collins &Fillery-Travis 2015). Within coaching the response has been to categorise coaching models in terms of the paradigm that is privileged in its underpinning theoretical frame. Indeed Cox et al (2014) have identified 13 specific theory-based approaches to coaching mostly coming from the psychotherapeutic traditions. This may say less about the relevance of psychotherapy to coaching than about the common knowledge base between education, psychology and HRD.

This diversity of underpinning paradigms allows a variety of occupations to lay claim to coaching as being a practice offshoot of their own discipline. The development of coaching

psychology as a sub-discipline within psychology (see for example the Coaching Psychology Unit at the University of Sydney Australia and the Coaching Psychology Academy Israel as well as British Psychology Society Special Interest Group) is well documented and a similar trend is developing within HRM and Education (instructional coaching in the US and the integration of positive and coaching psychology in Australia) van Nieuwerburgh (2012). The consequences are a substantial in terms of certification of coaches. As identified by Bono et al (2009) psychologist and non-psychologist coaches generated two distinct types of competency listings and as Bachkirova and Lawton Smith (2015) quote only 15% of outcomes in psychotherapy are attributed to theory and techniques. The knowledge base for coaching has thus become spread throughout a range of other disciplines. Coaches can therefore come from a range of discipline paradigms and traditions.

### **Current body of knowledge**

Numerous reviews have been constructed on the development of the knowledge base to support and extend these approaches. The most recent (Fillery-Travis & Passmore, 2011; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007) have all been concerned with the overall development of the coaching research base, the type of studies reported and the quality of the evidence produced. Specifically they lament the paucity of empirical studies and the small number of experimental studies that draw upon the ‘gold’ standard of research design – the randomised controlled trial (RCT). Such laments seem rather premature given the relative immaturity of the field of study. As identified by Cox and Fillery-Travis (2015) coaching research is going through a similar process to that of counselling and HRM

‘as practitioners initially sought to establish a defined field of practice as it matures to embrace differing psychological perspectives and context (organisational for example)] through sharing their own experience, and that of their clients, in case studies and other small scale enquiries. This work appealed to other coaches keen to develop their own professional tool kits. The criterion for such evidence was relevance and resonance with their practice and efficacy for their client base. As coaching grew in popularity, and with it the financial investment by organisations, there was a real driver for outcomes and return on investment figures appropriate to warrant large scale investment by organisations.’

The origin of the discontent with progress in achieving RCTs has been mainly from academics in psychology and related disciplines as they use their own discipline’s criteria for what constitutes knowledge and its rigour. Psychologists have a rich tradition of quantitative studies seeking generalisable evidence whereas educationalists, for example, have a mixed tradition of both qualitative and quantitative studies, as do management science and HRM. This is a clear example of differing paradigms operating within one field of study and there are a number of papers calling for larger scale generalisable results that mimic the psychological elite research at the same time as others are calling for the development of new methodologies such as ‘interspective research approaches’ (inherently qualitative) to explore the coaching interaction itself (Cox 2015). There is a tension in the research field between the development of a research literature based in the established criteria and norms of psychology and a body of knowledge answering (probably) broader questions with a more eclectic mix of methods and criteria for rigour.

In terms of overall progress the research arena is evolving and has moved from purely case study reporting into more consistent attempts to structure a theoretical framework for the practice and a delineation of where coaching adds its unique contribution to the field of human performance. The aim of research and the discipline must be to enable practitioners to tailor their interventions more finely to their clients' needs and to enable practitioners to be trained to provide an effective service. Maintaining the dialogue between practice and research is critical to producing a robust body of evidence. Coaching journals such as the *International Journal of Evidence Based Practice*; *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*; *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching*; *Mentoring and Tutoring* and the *International Coaching Psychology Review* all publish practitioner based research and are excellent sources of evidence based practice.

### **Academic courses**

The training of coaches is the final role in the discipline and one that started for coaching not in academia but within the professional training and development arenas and off-shoots of counselling and consulting psychology courses. Now there are 84 postgraduate courses (PGC or above) in the UK covering coaching and mentoring as a single focus but noticeably also as subject specific variants specifically within education and health. A scoping project in the US during 2007 identified 49 academic institutions providing coaching courses at degree or postgraduate level with 65 offering it as a continuing education programme (Stein 2007). This has increased markedly in recent years but to date there is still only a couple of Masters degrees operating in the US. Outside the US there are over 200 masters level course with significant focus on coaching although there is still significant provision at lower levels by non-academic

training schools as exemplified by the 111 training providers accredited with the EMCC to provide coach training of which only 7 are from academic institutions (EMCC). A critical point in this analysis is the lack of an undergraduate degree in coaching. This is in marked contrast to the degrees available in social work - currently debating its professional standing -and nursing which is a profession newly formed from a very well established specialised trade or vocation (Findlow 2012). It seems unlikely that coaching will achieve fully professional status until the need for a first degree programme is widely accepted (cf. sports coaching).

There are a number of academics providing coaching courses but a recent search within ResearchGate (ResearchGate 2015) identifies only a few identify themselves exclusively as academics in the coaching field. The majority place themselves in the arena of professional development, Human Resource Practice, education or management science. Consequently the postgraduate courses (including doctorates) are placed within Business Schools or Education Departments. The main linkage from academia to a profession or practice of coaching would be the negotiation of a framework for the curriculum that provides the benchmark for professional training within the academic environment. This has progressed in a meaningful way in the US with the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching (GSAEC) a body developed with the aim to 'To establish and maintain the standards for education and training provided by academic institutions for the discipline and practice of executive and organizational coaching' (Stein 2012). Within Europe such initiatives are in their infancy and driven by the professional associations through accreditation and credentialing.

Coaching may never achieve the status of a full discipline, as it may not have sufficient unique knowledge that is not shared with other people-intensive practices. There is clearly a body of coaching knowledge and some is unique to coaching and of sufficient depth. This is simply not enough of it to warrant fully disciplinary status. The reason, we believe, is that the core activity (and underpinning knowledge) is shared with other practices such as mentoring, counselling and facilitation. Each requires exquisite skills and competencies to achieve real competency but they are not sufficiently differentiated to become disciplines in their own right. This leads us to consider coaching as a sub-discipline but one of specific merit as it adds value to a range of disciplines. Specifically these overarching disciplines include HRM/HRD, education, health and finally psychology. How coaching would align to each would be through the intentionality. In seeking to develop the learning of an individual coaching would add value within education (adult and professional); where the focus is on coaching support of counselling type intentions then the fit would be within psychology. Similarly coaching adds value to HRM/D is the development of business performance in the medium and long term through its people -coaching, mentoring, facilitation (team).

### **Implications for a Discipline of Coaching**

Traditionally professions are underpinned by an academic discipline and for a body of knowledge to be an academic discipline there needs to be sufficient unique knowledge for the academy to teach as a separate subject. The challenge for coaching is that whereas there is a substantial body of knowledge, a significant amount of it is currently shared with education, HRM and, to lesser extent, psychology. This does not mean it is not specialised, skilful or impactful but it does represent a fundamental challenge to the emergence of coaching as a



discipline and subsequently a profession. In our analysis so far we have identified coaching to be a management craft and an interdisciplinary practice, drawing its knowledge from a range of different fields as well as its own research. The knowledge it uses is also applied within other areas of people intensive practice viz: Mentors, Facilitators, Counsellors, trainers and educators. This places it in a somewhat unusual position of being a body of knowledge (unique but small) that could be identified as a sub-discipline that underpins specialist practice within a variety of distinct professional areas with their own discipline bases. The lack of an undergraduate degree but the proliferation of Post Graduate Certificates, Masters and higher-level CPD in the field is illustrative of this position. Coaching practitioners are drawn from a range of backgrounds and have a variety of initial disciplines that they seek to complement with a specialisation in coaching. Therefore the concepts of discipline (and profession as we see later) are not fully descriptive of coaching's potential contribution to individual and organisational development.

As identified by Drake (2008)

‘Perhaps (coaching) will come to be seen as a movement that profoundly shaped the arenas in which it is currently practiced- leadership and management development; team and individual performance; training support and organisational learning; career and life transitions; relationship and conversations - yielding a spectrum of providers, in which only some people are seen as professional coaches’ ppx

The concept of ‘movement’ seems too ethereal for what is a small but still high level and unique body of knowledge and we prefer to label it as a coaching sub-discipline to identify its

knowledge base to be of sufficient quality to allow it to be taught and to warrant the continuation of research in the field.

What qualifies as evidence within such a sub-discipline is not straightforward and would require a sophisticated understanding of what constitutes evidence for a management craft or interdisciplinary practice. It would need to meet the specific criteria used by practitioners from a variety of disciplines operating within their own paradigms (for example education vs psychology). There can be no simple retreat to large scale, generalisable research outcomes but a more pragmatic approach that allows the question being asked (itself a product of the paradigm being used) to drive the research design and hence dedicate the criteria for rigour.

As Cox and Fillery-Travis (2015) identify ‘If we look at what could usefully be the focus of research in the future, as well as exploring elements of the interaction in order to understand what constitutes coaching, there appears to be a significant need to test the entire model of coaching. Specifically coaching suffers from the same issue as therapy – our clients are not uniform. Addressing this ‘uniformity myth’ we might adjust the oft-cited comment by Paul (1967: 11) from counselling to relate to the coaching context:

‘*what* coaching, delivered by *whom*, is most effective for *this* client with *that* specific issue and under *which* set of circumstances?’

Each element of this question requires varying forms of evidence and the elucidation of these will require a further integration of practice and evidence.

### **Summary Implications for Coaching Going Forward**

We have shown that although coaching has matured along the established routes of professionalisation and there is a unique body of knowledge (albeit small within a substantial generic knowledge base) but the practice of coaching does not fulfil, and nor can it, one of the critical requirements of a full profession - market closure of the occupation with the requirement for certification to practice based on client needs. As identified by Grant, Passmore , Cavanugh and Parker (2010)

‘when judged against the commonly accepted criteria for professional status the coaching industry display few of the standard hallmarks. There are no barriers to entry, no minimal or requisite educational process or specified training and no binding ethical or practice standards (Sherman & Freas 2004)’pp 127.

Currently coaching is carried out by a range of professionals and practitioners as an important contribution to their core practice of education, psychology, health etc or for the minority as the main focus of their practice. The low level of risk associated with the practice, be it financial or psychological, does not provide the imperative for the restriction of practice to the full time coach and the corresponding loss of practitioners to the work.

That does not mean that the practice of coaching is not highly specialised nor of high value to society. Primary level teaching started out as a trade occupation requiring education to the level of teaching certificates developed outside the academy and even now higher level teaching in Universities does not require a specific teaching certification. Nursing has undergone a similar journey to being a recently professionalised occupation when the traditional technical education supported by an apprenticeship model no longer could safely teach the higher risk and

specialised tasks nurses had taken over from doctors as the medical professions reorganised in light of new knowledge and working practices (Becky 1999). Thus the perceived degree of value and risk of the practice drives the route to its regulation. It is interesting to note that the practice of psychology didn't go through the non-professional or trade phase, as there was an immediate identification of the level of risk associated with the practice. There cannot be the same level of risk for coaching where the work concentrates upon improvements to performance in a multi-factored environment. The risks are low and the perceived benefits wide ranging but generally not quantified (Fillery-Travis & Passmore 2012).

The occupation of coaching is clearly a craft capable of delivering a service of great complexity requiring a range of high-level capabilities from the practitioners. We have shown that being a craft does not preclude the need for regulation and standards by trade bodies nor the provision of masters and doctoral level education programmes. Indeed each will be necessary to take the work forward in light of the increasing range of coaching modes and provision that is being developed e.g. team coaching (Hawkins 2011).

This brings us to perhaps the more interesting question of whether the practice of coaching is underpinned by a discipline i.e. a body of knowledge of sufficient range and depth to require teaching within higher education as a separate subject. The lack of undergraduate degrees would indicate that this is NOT the case. The situation is more complex and we would suggest indicative of the coaching body of knowledge and capabilities making substantial contribution to a range of disciplines and not just one. Such disciplines include HRM/HRD, education, health and finally psychology as we have discussed previously. This would open a potentially fruitful

strategy for collaborative research in the field of people-intensive practices (such as coaching, mentoring, facilitation and counselling) that would embrace the range of paradigms operating in these fields as well as mirroring the practice in the field where a suitably trained individual can don the mantle of coach, counsellor or facilitator as required to attend to an people-intensive issue within the workplace.

Thus for coaching at the present time we suggest the following descriptor is appropriate: **A professional practice, or management craft underpinned by a sub-discipline in people-intensive practices that is shared with other professions.**

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