

★ Coaching and Counselling in the Workplace: Clarity or confusion?

Raewyn Laurenson considers whether we are clear about what is *coaching* and what is *counselling*.



There has been an increasing call for evidence based methods to be used in business, clinical practice and by those professionals identifying themselves as coaches and counsellors. Because of increased pressure on finances and resources, organisations are concerned about outcomes. In other words, workplaces want to employ professionals who know what they are doing, what precisely they are offering and who can predict a reasonable chance of success based on the evidence and research available. It is also important for training and tertiary institutions to ensure that the courses and programmes that are being offered are in line with what businesses and organisations require for their employees. Professional coaches and counsellors want to be able to distinguish what they are offering and align themselves to an appropriate professional ethical body.

Lack of clarity can potentially bring harm to individual clients, for example if an employee was offered coaching for stress related issues and that client was deeply depressed and potentially suicidal. The coach may not have the skills to pick this up or may be focused on the contract and goals at hand and not recognise the symptoms. At the very least the coachee could become further disengaged from work or life, feeling appropriate help was not available. If this happens, organisations may come under fire and may be held responsible for negative outcomes both financially and otherwise.

Kampa-Kokesch, (2001) argues that coaching by psychologists is just another form of packaging for executives. It is consulting or counselling in a different form, potentially undervaluing counselling, coaching and consulting. Executive coaching has been proposed as an intervention aimed at helping executives improve their performance and consequently the performance of the overall organization (Kilburg, 1996). Whether or not it does what it proposes, however, remains largely unknown because of the lack of empirical studies. Some also question whether executive coaching is just another fad in the long list of fads that have occurred in consulting and business.

Both coaching and counselling in the workplace focus on individuals and groups or teams and say they are about moving people forward and assisting them to make changes that will improve the quality of their lives at work and potentially remove the barriers that impede successful performance. But where does one start and the other finish? Where is the clarity?

Clarity can only enhance good ethical practice, encourage appropriate professional training and give clients and organisations clear expectations and the confidence they will be met and no harm done.

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References

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