



# Mindfulness and Coaching: Contemporary Labels for Timeless Practices?

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Coaching has been described previously as an applied positive psychology (e.g. Kemp, 2004; Grant, 2009) and similarly, mindfulness has also come to find a comfortable philosophical and contextual home within the broader field of positive psychology (Langer, 2009). The exploration of mindfulness and coaching as a methodological partnership has attracted burgeoning theoretical and research interest in recent years. Whilst empirical investigations relating to the topic remain sparse, embryonic findings have yielded promising support for the efficacy of mindfulness techniques and practices when applied to a coaching context (Spence, Cavanagh & Grant, 2008).

It was Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) who highlighted that mindfulness lay at the heart of Buddhist meditation, a practice that has itself flourished for more than 2,500 years. As a result, the related fields of mindfulness and meditation boast an extensive foundation of experiential knowledge derived from eastern

enquiry and practice that predates Western psychology itself by more than 2,000 years. Given the extent of the intrigue these two practice approaches now attract, it appears timely that an exploration of their structure, relatedness and methodology for facilitating growth and learning is discussed. Hence, the current chapter has three main intentions. The first intention is to provide a broad positioning of contemporary coaching and mindfulness in relation to their status as applied positive psychology practices.

Next, it seeks to highlight and illustrate the inextricably symbiotic connection that exists between mindfulness and coaching, the complementarity of their theoretical underpinnings and how these can be brought together effectively, simply and logically within an integrated framework.

Finally, the chapter will call for a reconceptualisation of the current definitions and practices associated with each of the these two methods in consideration of the extensive

emergent and historical bodies of knowledge that inform their core practices and processes, now labelled ‘coaching’ and ‘mindfulness’, but which have been practised under their more common headings of ‘education’ and ‘meditation’ for millennia. By reinstating these terms to the discourse, it is hoped to further the creation of an integrated framework for contextual understanding that simplifies both practice and research within the broader context of human growth and development.

### **MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS: AN OVERVIEW**

So widespread has the application of mindfulness become that it is now commonly prescribed for a vast array of conditions including stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, pain, weight management, heart disease, cancer, dementia, sleep, education, workplace performance, leadership and even self-actualisation and enlightenment (McKenzie & Hassed, 2012). In introducing the first issue of the international peer-reviewed scientific journal *Mindfulness*, Singh (2010) highlighted the extensive contemporary proliferation of mindfulness research as the driver behind the creation of this new peer-reviewed publication vehicle to further understanding and practice within the field.

In the subsequent years since Kabat-Zinn’s then ‘radical’ treatment methods utilising *meditation* and *yoga practice* to treat terminally ill patients were trialed (Kabat-Zinn, 1982), mindfulness and meditation have become mainstream terms within the western wellness movement and the broader social vernacular. The applications of mindfulness have also broadened beyond those outlined in the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programs Kabat-Zinn pioneered to, more recently, the achievement of peak performance in highly stressful environments such as combat pilots (Meland et al., 2015), maximising cognitive function and academic

performance (e.g. Mrazek et al., 2013) and peak performance athletics (e.g. Gardner & Moore, 2004; Thienot et al., 2014). More broadly, mindfulness practice has been demonstrated to positively impact wellbeing and reduce stress, anxiety and rumination (Shapiro et al., 2008) and significantly increase goal attainment (Spence 2006; Spence, Cavanagh & Grant, 2008).

Of interest to many is the ascension of mindfulness practice in the workplace, despite the dearth of empirical research in this domain (Dane & Brummel, 2013). These researchers conducted a study utilising the Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) in their exploration of turnover intention, engagement and job performance in restaurant waiting staff. In the conduct of their study, the authors proposed a valuable contextual definition for workplace mindfulness, defining it as; ‘... the degree to which individuals are mindful in a given work context’ (p. 119). Their results indicated a positive directional relationship between workplace mindfulness and job performance; Results that strengthened earlier findings by Reb et al. (2012) of the positive effects of leaders’ mindfulness on job performance of subordinates.

Despite the recent widespread reporting across most popular genres of media and literature, mindfulness practice is far from new. The foundations of mindfulness are firmly rooted in Buddhist philosophies and practices, and have been for more than 3,000 years. Indeed, meditation, the *crucible* in which mindfulness resides, has for millennia, served practitioners in their pursuit of deeper awareness and understanding of self, others, environment and existence. In the Buddhist context, this practice has focussed on three distinct areas; *keeping the Buddha in mind*, *being present* and *noticing habit-patterns* (Brazier, 2003). It is the latter two that have translated most readily to contemporary western practices of mindfulness and are terms that have become common in the mindfulness literature.

Meditation, in its most reductionist and simplistic form, can be considered concentration (Henepola Gunaratana, 2002) whilst some western researchers such as Walsh (1983) have described it as:

... a family of practices that train attention in order to heighten awareness and bring mental processes under greater voluntary control. The ultimate aims of these practices are the development of deep insight into the nature of mental processes, consciousness, identity, and reality, and the development of optimal states of psychological well-being and consciousness. (p. 19)

Walsh elaborates by identifying mindfulness as the first of seven Buddhist meditators' 'factors of enlightenment' and defines it as; '*... the quality of being aware of the nature of the object of consciousness*' (p. 28). Similarly, Levine (2009) highlights in succinct and simple terms the links between mindfulness and Buddhist meditation. The nine Buddhist practices for attaining Liberation cluster into three main headings; Wisdom, Ethics and Inner Practice. This last cluster encompasses the core of mindfulness practice.

Whilst the notion of introspective, inner-practice appears central to meditation, authors including Littman-Ovadia, Zilcha-Mano and Langer (2014) make explicit the challenges inherent in developing a connection and understanding between the contemplative and experientially focussed eastern approaches that are central to Buddhist practice, and the more contemporary Western scientific approaches utilised to establish empirical knowledge. Whilst most researchers and practitioners in the field clearly acknowledge that a connection appears to exist, the challenges of investigating this phenomenon utilising a scientific paradigm necessitate the creation and validation of a repeatedly and consistently measureable construct. It is here that the challenges of bringing these two divergent philosophies together as a focus point for investigation begin to surface.

## THE CHALLENGES OF DEFINING MINDFULNESS

When the curious student of mindfulness is first introduced to the field, she quickly realises that what appears to be a relatively simple construct and approach to practice, remains deceptively difficult to pin-down. Kabat-Zinn (1990), arguably the founder of mindfulness in western therapy (Singh, 2010), offered a definition that has strongly influenced the field's development to date:

Simply put, mindfulness is moment-to-moment awareness. It is cultivated by purposefully paying attention to things we ordinarily never give a moment's thought to. It is a systematic approach to developing new kinds of control and wisdom in our lives, based on our inner capacities for relaxation, paying attention, awareness, and insight. (p. 2)

However since that point, there have been a plethora of contributions made by scholars in search of an elusive and succinct description of what remains a paradoxical conundrum. Whilst some researchers suggest that mindfulness has been reduced to a contemporary buzzword (Sun, 2014), others have persisted with the formidable task of blending the intangibility of an eastern spiritual practice with the quantitative reductionism of a western scientific paradigm. Authors such as Cavanagh & Spence (2013) have highlighted this 'fuzziness' and described it as a 'confused' construct. In their effort to reduce this confusion, these authors identified four core domains that occupy the current research literature on mindfulness, namely, *state*, *trait*, *process* and *philosophy*. Their exploration yields a succinct definition of the construct: 'A motivated state of decentered awareness brought about by receptive attending to present moment experience' (p. 117).

Ellen Langer, an acknowledged early pioneer within mindfulness research, describes mindfulness as 'the process of actively noticing new things' (Beard, 2014, p.68). Her early research (Langer & Abelson, 1972)

highlighted the phenomenon of our inherent *mindlessness* in common communications and interactions with others. It is in exploring mindfulness from the juxtaposition of *mindlessness* that distinguishes Langer's valuable contribution to the literature. In approaching the exploration of mindfulness in this way, Langer (2014) asserts that amongst the many benefits of practising mindfulness is the creation of an inherent awareness of *doubt* and *uncertainty* that subsequently allows for *choice*. With *certainty* of events and phenomena, Langer argued, came mindlessness, automatic and habitual responding which was antithetical to mindful awareness.

However, for some, the problems in arriving at a consensual agreement on the term lie in the conceptual approach taken to understanding the phenomenon itself, rather than articulating the subjective experience and practice of it. Sternberg (2000) addressed this challenge by approaching the issue of definition with a broader question in mind; *How should mindfulness be understood?* Sternberg suggests that the way we choose to approach this broader question fundamentally influences our conceptualisation of the construct and hence the way in which we engage with the practice and investigation of it. To elaborate on his point, he proposes three distinct conceptualisations of mindfulness to be explored, namely, mindfulness as a *cognitive ability*, as a *personality trait* and as a *cognitive style*.

Whilst these attempts at definitional clarity contribute accretively to our breadth of understanding, Carmody (2014) argues that continuing attempts to arrive at a universally agreed upon definition of mindfulness only serve to detract from the underlying practice itself. All mindfulness programs, he argues, focus on the unique *experiencing* and *attending-to* of the individual practitioner that leads to improvements in well-being. According to Carmody, whilst the traditional eastern conceptualisation of mindfulness focuses on personal introspection to reduce mental

suffering, western approaches have emphasised the focus firstly on one's attention to environmental cues, then actively manipulating these experiences and responses to achieve a more desirable cognitive-emotional outcome. Thus, the western approach becomes one of challenging one's *intellect* to create new perspectives and meaning from experience in order to subsequently counteract and challenge one's habitual tendency towards mindlessness and prejudice. This strongly self-directed approach to learning mindfulness supports the utilisation of a more explicit teaching and learning model within the coaching engagement.

Recent research presented by Kiken et al. (2015) is of particular significance to these conceptual distinctions. Their study utilised a prospective, observational design with repeated measures of *trait* and *state* mindfulness during the course of a mindfulness-based intervention modelled on Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Their results indicated an increase in *trait* mindfulness consistent with increased *state* mindfulness, facilitated through meditation practice, and associated reductions in stress reduction. These findings suggest embryonic support for the notion of 'practice makes permanent' and highlight the role of learning and skill development in mindfulness practice. Further, if one considers mindfulness as a 'learnable skill' in addition to be a 'state of being', the potential for its integration as both a *method* and an *outcome* within the context of coaching becomes conceivable.

Arguably one of the more perplexing issues facing mindfulness researchers and practitioners lies in the delineation between *personal* practice and *client* practice. The question of whether or not *personal* mindfulness practice by the *practitioner*, in this case, the coach, is a prerequisite for the effective facilitation of mindfulness remains unclear. Many, including Kabat-Zinn (2003) himself suggest that personal practice is essential for those who are researching or teaching

mindfulness in therapeutic settings. Further, Singh (2010) suggests that without this personal practice, it is difficult for a therapist to relate to, and provide feedback on, the client's unique experience of mindfulness practice. Whilst the similarities and differences between coaching and therapy continue to attract spirited debate within the literature, the proposition that the coaching alliance (Kemp, 2008, 2011) may be strengthened and made efficacious as a result of the coach's own mindfulness and meditation practice, the expectation that the 'teacher' is also the 'student' would appear vital.

### **BRINGING COACHING AND MINDFULNESS TOGETHER**

Clearly, there is a potentially valuable contribution that both coaching and mindfulness bring to creating a healthy and flourishing life. The challenge remains as to how to practically and effectively bring these two methods together into an integrated intervention that enables the coachee to achieve their growth and development goals most effectively, efficiently and sustainably. Virgili (2013) highlighted that, at that point, very few scholarly articles existed linking mindfulness and coaching; an apparently persistent condition reaffirmed later by Hall (2014, 2015). However, as Virgili justifiably articulates, the importance of *present-moment attention* and *non-judgemental awareness*, and the self-awareness that these practices nurture, are far from foreign to the *practice* of coaching.

To this point, earlier work by Passmore & Marianetti (2007) proposed a number of theoretical applications of mindfulness within coaching practice that included; *preparing for coaching, maintaining focus during the session, remaining emotionally detached, and teaching mindfulness to coachees*. Of note is that the primary focus of the application of mindfulness was the *coach*, rather

than the *coachee* however even at this early stage, the coach as *teacher*. Via a reference to Segal, Williams and Teasdale's (2002) earlier work with mindfulness and depression in therapeutic settings, Passmore and Marianetti were amongst the first to formally propose that the specific skills of mindfulness could be beneficially *taught* as an integral part of the coaching process. Providing more substantial empirical evidence for this efficacy, Collard & Walsh (2008) examined the impact of participation in mindfulness coaching groups by non-clinical populations, similar to those found in many coaching cohorts. Their treatment yielded a significant reduction in coachee stress following participation in two mindfulness training sessions over an eight week period.

Broader explorations of the relationship between education and mindfulness were presented by Davis (2012). It was here that the potential of mindfulness practices in educational psychology began to be highlighted with Davis concluding that sufficient evidence to justify the incorporation of mindfulness based approaches into educational practice settings now existed within the mindfulness and education literatures.

Emerging research addressing the more specific application of mindfulness as an effective coaching tool for building physical and mental health (Robins, Kiken, Holt & McCain, 2014) and authentic leadership (Kinsler, 2014) are two examples of the now rapid is the broadening interest in the use of coaching and mindfulness in the field of human development.

### ***Mindfulness and Different Reflective Conversations in Coaching***

Of particular pertinence presently is the theoretical construct originally articulated by Cavanagh (2006) and further elaborated upon by Cavanagh and Spence (2013) outlining the five key reflective conversations within

the coaching engagement. These conversations include:

- The internal conversation of the coachee
- The conversation between the coachee and their world
- The internal conversation of the coach
- The coach's conversation with his/her world
- The shared conversation of coach and coachee

This theoretical framework highlights the multiple domains within the coaching engagement that lend themselves to mindfulness-based intervention. Whilst some authors, such as Kets de Vries (2014) highlight the criticality of personal reflection on their own internal dialogue and hence, the application of mindfulness to across these multiple coaching conversations appears warranted.

By way of example, the pathway outlined by Cavanagh and Spence highlights the core coach attitude, and behavioural input, of 'acceptance'. This internalised state will likely fluctuate from moment to moment and conversation to conversation within the coach. The argument in support of developing elevated levels of state mindfulness as a coach therefore is that the coach becomes better able to manage her emotional reactivity, and subsequently, behave more flexibly through improved self-regulation. By achieving this aim, the coach can better support her client's goal attainment and self-management as there is greater 'self vs other' clarity in the espoused goal. Of course, phenomenologically, each of these effects represent a dynamic continuum upon which the coach may deviate inconsistently and unpredictably. Likewise, the coachee himself fluctuates in 'mind and mood' perpetually.

The benefits and opportunities that are presented in the blending of coaching with mindfulness are exciting. Both methods are fundamentally geared towards growth, development and flourishing, demonstrate a deeply embedded component of introspection and personal reflection inherent in their practices

and apply the insights gained through this process to the outside world. However a functional model for bringing these two practices together is required.

## WHERE TO FROM HERE? INTEGRATING COACHING AND MINDFULNESS

A major challenge that we have identified previously in this chapter is establishing a universally validated definition of any new field of enquiry and the subsequent construction of a unique body of knowledge. Whilst increasing effort is currently being applied to these tasks, we have potentially overlooked, at least partially, the deep foundations of practice and understanding that are held within the related bodies of knowledge in *education and learning*; foundations upon which coaching was born. Whilst the topic of *positive education* has stimulated a greater volume of interest and research in the application of positive psychology within educational settings (Gilman, Huebner & Furlong, 2009; Van Nieuwerburgh, 2012), an extensive existing body of knowledge from the broader field of education is still yet to be fully discovered, acknowledged and applied to practice.

Bachkirova et al. (2014) were amongst the first to acknowledge the significance of the role that *education and learning* occupies in underpinning *all* coaching practice. Specifically, they proposed that Knowles' (1970) construct of adult education (andragogy), Kolb's (1984) construct of experiential learning and Mezirow's (2000) construct of transformative learning effectively combined to form a collective body of informing knowledge and practice principles that are now arguably 'relabelled' as coaching in our contemporary discourse. In an attempt to draw these methods together, experiential education provides both a theoretical and functional framework within which coaching

and mindfulness can be readily integrated. In exploring the foundations of education most broadly, and by surfacing its deep and extensive knowledge base, the broader field of education becomes an obvious conceptual integrator of these two practice methods.

### **Experiential Learning**

It was Kolb (1984) who first presented his four-stage model of experiential learning formally in the literature. This model, informed by the philosophies of Dewey (1884), amongst others, consisted of an engaging in an *experience*, processing that experience through *reflection*, capturing and synthesising the *learning* from the experience and finally *experimentation* through the direct application of that learning to a new experience. In spite of an ever increasing litany of 'proprietary' coaching models in the popular literature, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle remains the only evidence-based and validated model for facilitated, learner-driven, integrated development activities, of which, coaching is one.

Joplin (1995) provided an eloquent overview of the guiding philosophy underlying experiential education as a discipline. Far from being a contemporary developmental fad, the foundation of experiential education as a unique methodology for achieving significant individual and personal development is firmly grounded in the metaphysical and epistemological teachings of Plato and Socrates. Indeed, experiential education can be seen as closely aligned to the fundamental Socratic philosophies of learning (Crosby, 1995). Whilst consensual agreement as to a single definition of experiential education amongst practitioners remains elusive, several elements common to most descriptions of the construct can be identified (Joplin, 1995).

Two key elements appear most fundamental to the experiential program. Firstly, the learner must engage in an *experience or an*

*activity* and secondly, and equally importantly, there must be a *guided or facilitated reflection* following this experience which, in-turn, is translated to meaning and learning. It is this active and guided reflection process which transforms simply *any* experience into experiential education. Joplin outlines nine core characteristics common to effective experiential programs. The experience must be *learner directed* as opposed to facilitator driven and it must be *personal and affective in nature*. The *process* of achieving an outcome is equally as important as the outcome itself and *self evaluation* in the context of the experience is both an internal and external process. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the experiential program must be conducted through the gathering of a diverse range of data including subjective reports and narrative discourse that captures the participants' unique experience. The experience itself must be central to the learning program as opposed to the experience being secondary to the objective of transferring a body of knowledge or fact didactically to the learner. Unlike alternate pedagogical methodologies, experiential education is based on the participants' *subjective* perception of the event rather than the didactic transfer of a theoretical body of knowledge. The effective articulation of participants' direct experience as knowledge is central to the learning process.

From these descriptions, it can be seen that the coaching process, by any current definition, is clearly experiential learning in its purest form. Hence, there is a simple and ready-made framework for integrating mindfulness practice into this model, whilst at the same time maintaining the flexibility to incorporate the nuanced language of coaching in its application and utilisation.

### **The Foundations of Andragogy**

Experiential education, being a learner-centred model of learning, lends itself seamlessly to the preferred styles of learning

expressed by many mature age learners. It was Knowles (1970) however who was the first author to articulate a theoretical construct that identified the specific needs of adult learners and as a distinct form of learning (androgogy) that differed from children's learning styles (or *pedagogy*). Specifically, Knowles argued that:

- Adults need to know the purpose for learning something. (As distinct from children learning for learnings' sake and a less 'critical' need for meaning.)
- Greater breadth and depth of experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities. (As distinct from children's relative paucity of experience.)
- Adults need to be responsible for and involved in their decisions on education; involvement in the planning and evaluation of their instruction. They are, in effect, collaborators in the process. (As distinct from children who are passive recipients of the process.)
- Adults are most interested in learning content that has immediate relevance to their work and/or personal lives. (As distinct from children who are content to be taught the curriculum as it is mandated and legislated.)
- Adult learning is problem-centered in that it must have a clear purpose and outcome rather than being content of general interest and use. (As distinct from children who appreciate less structured and rigid.)
- Adults respond better to internal motivators rather than external rewards (with children preferring the opposite).

Recent efforts have provided strong validation for both the unique construct of androgogy and its empirical measurement using the Androgogical Practices Inventory (Holton, Wilson & Bates, 2009). The authors reported strong scale reliability and coefficients for *motivation, experience, need to know, readiness, self-directedness, setting of learning objectives, climate setting, evaluation, prepare the learner, designing the learning experience and learning activities*. On reflection, these scales demonstrate remarkable similarities with the coaching process and its

intended outcomes and in addition, many of the antecedents that lead to beneficial outcomes from mindfulness practice. Clearly, the theoretical alignment and similarity of method, approach and outcomes could easily classify coaching as an *applied androgogical method* in addition to its status as an applied positive psychology.

Whilst the wholesale adoption of coaching as an androgogical method would be justified, the basic validity of the construct itself remains contentious. Authors such as Kerka (1994), have rightfully drawn attention to the unfounded assumptions perpetuated in self-directed learning, identifying and dispelling three key myths in this regard. The first myth is that adults are naturally self-directed, when, in reality, their capability for self-directed learning varies widely. The second myth is that self-direction is an all-or-nothing concept. In fact, adults have varying degrees of willingness, motivation or ability to assume personal responsibility for learning and the application of these is situationally variable. These may include the degree of choice over goals, objectives, type of participation, content, method, and assessment. The third myth is that self-directed learning means learning in isolation. In truth, the essential ingredient within self-directed learning may be the psychological control that a learner exerts in any setting, be it solitary, informal, or traditional. In addition to these criticisms, other studies such as those presented by Friestad (1998) highlight that both children and adults prefer to learn in an 'androgogical fashion'. Given a conducive environment and efficacious facilitation, even children prefer to be self-directed and experiential in the way they learn.

### **Proactivity and Self-Determination**

Consistent with these assumptions of adult learning (Knowles, Deci and Vansteenkiste, 2004) later contributed three additional observations central to Deci and Ryan's (1980)



self-determination theory. Firstly, humans tend to demonstrate inherent *proactivity* and associated desire and effort towards mastering their internal cognitions, perceptions, drivers and emotions. A potentially obscure term to translate, Crant (2000) defined proactive behaviour as: 'taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions' (p. 436).

Further, Siebert, Kraimer & Crant (2001) distinguished between proactive *behaviour* and proactive *personality* describing the latter as a more stable and endearing disposition to demonstrate personal initiative across a range of situations and contexts. These findings support the important place that *self-direction* plays in the experiential learning process.

Whilst there remains contention regarding the distinctions between pedagogy and androgogy, learning styles appear to be less related to age than first thought. Hence, the potential benefits of establishing an inclusive *education and learning* focussed framework for coaching and mindfulness can be succinctly articulated:

- Coaching is an educational experience.
- Mindfulness is an educational experience.
- Education methodology incorporates both learner-centered and teacher-centered approaches to learning.
- The utilisation and application of each family of approaches is situationally dependent upon the following factors:
  - the skill being taught/learnt
  - the experience and competence of the learner and teacher in the skill itself
  - the context in which the learning and teaching are occurring
  - the timeframe in which the learning and teaching are occurring
  - the shared goals and objectives of the teacher and learner.

One of the arguably contentious consequences of adopting an anthropologically

informed model of human development in the context of coaching is the unique place that many approaches and processes that have been actively excluded from the coaching method to date are arguably both central and critical to a client realising effective learning outcomes. Techniques including *expert advice, technical and corrective feedback, didactic teaching, skills training and directive action setting* are all vitally important and implicit techniques that when delivered in the appropriate context and form and at the appropriate time to the appropriate coachee, are invaluable elements of the experiential learning process.

Whilst there have been some theorists courageous enough to argue on behalf of the place of expert knowledge in coaching, they are few and far between and have been largely confined to the executive coaching context and leadership (Elliot, 2005) or business (Boyce et al., 2010). The current discourse therefore argues strongly *against* the popular belief that didactic delivery of expert knowledge detracts from facilitating successful coaching outcomes (Ives, 2008) and, to the contrary, that coaching practitioners are compelled to increase their technical expertise as *educators* and *mindfulness meditators* if they are to be truly effective in supporting their coachees' learning.

### ***An Evolving Convergence of Approaches***

As the evolution towards learner-centred teaching progresses, we are witnessing a rapid integration of *experiential, facilitated and learner-driven* education and a widespread convergence of coaching with traditional teaching approaches (e.g. van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). Simply stated, the science of learning is deepening and the boundaries between traditional pedagogical and androgogical practices appear to be merging towards a more situationally determined, learner-driven and methodologically flexible

style of learning that applies elements of a range of approaches at varying times. Whilst there is no accepted term for this merged method, the adoption of a new term, *anthrology*, from the Greek *anthropos* meaning 'human' may provide a more apt working framework.

By adopting an experiential educational approach to coaching and mindfulness practice, the potential positive impact of the coaching intervention is dramatically expanded. By drawing on the broader informing bodies of knowledge, practice methods and protocols across education, learning and mindfulness, the parameters of coaching practice can be expanded to include 'teaching' as a legitimate component of the coaching method, thus legitimising the formal instruction of mindfulness skills and approaches within the coaching intervention. By broadening the definition of coaching practice to that of an *anthrological science*, client process, experience and outcomes can be strengthened through the formal teaching of skillsets that equip them to sustain their own independent wellbeing whilst synchronously, coaching practitioners themselves are better able to broaden and deepen their own capabilities as educators and growth agents.

### **Positive Psychoeducation**

Building on the adoption of an anthrological frame to integrate coaching practice with mindfulness, 'positive psychoeducation' also provides a valuable addition. Applied as a facilitative teaching and enrichment method to deepen the coachee's understanding of the *psychology* of mindfulness, positive psychoeducation provides an additional educative component to the coaching engagement.

Traditional psychoeducation has been predominantly utilised as a mental-illness treatment approach that combines psychotherapeutic and educational interventions within a more holistic and competence-based modality that focuses on client wellness, coping and

empowerment (Lukens & McFarlane, 2004). The earliest explicit use of the term in the psychiatric literature was by Anderson et al. (1980) but it was the later work by Bäuml et al. (2006) that provided valuable insights into the critical elements central to achieving efficacious patient outcomes. The authors suggest that the goals of psychoeducation include; ensuring basic client competence, facilitating self-responsibility, deepening patients' role as expert, strengthening the role of relatives (others), combining techniques with client empowerment, improving insight into the conditions which restrict the desired state, promoting relapse prevention, supporting broader health and economising educational activities.

Whilst much of the literature has focussed heavily on the clinical and therapeutic applications of psychoeducation to the treatment of psychological disorders, some practitioners within these disciplines have consistently argued for a more empowering, positive and self-efficacious growth-centered approach to the treatment of mental illness (e.g. Egan, 1975, 2013). Indeed, Authier (1977) and earlier, Guerney, Guerney and Stollak (1971) and Guerney, Stollak and Guerney (1970) had highlighted and advocated for the positive, growth-focussed opportunities inherent in the method.

Hence, to effectively integrate mindfulness and coaching practices, the adoption of a broader, experiential and anthrological model that outlines a process for effectively teaching the skills and practice of mindfulness may be of benefit. Further, the application of positive psychoeducation techniques to strengthen and consolidate the learning outcomes achieved through the coaching engagement, and to ensure the sustainability of these learned skills, provides a meta-cognitive context to the symbiotic relationship that exists between mindfulness and coaching. Hence, through the purposeful and deliberate application of the methods and techniques of anthrological science to the process of coaching, it is proposed that

clients will strengthen their mastery of mindfulness whilst concurrently maximising their goal striving and attainment successes.

### **APPLYING THE NEW FRAMEWORK TO OLD PRACTICES: A TEMPLATE FOR ANTHROGOGICAL ENGAGEMENT**

From the outset, a model of anthropological coaching may be seen to directly contravene what many consider to be the central tenet of coaching itself. To elaborate, most coaching theorists and researchers to date have argued strongly for the immutable ownership of the coaching agenda residing with the client herself rather than the coach. Hence, the locus of creation and control of goal setting, action planning, problem solving and reflective analysis is owned, by definition, by the client. However, by introducing an anthropological paradigm to the coaching construct, the role of the coach becomes one of co-creator and teacher within the context of a learning experience. By applying the wealth of evidence based education to coaching, clear stages, phases and cycles that are repeated and common to all styles of facilitated anthropological learning become evident. By firstly identifying these empirically robust learning stages, then applying these stages to the coaching process, mindfulness can be effectively taught, practised and refined as an integral and concurrent function of the coaching intervention itself and hence, enable mindfulness skill acquisition to be achieved simultaneously with coaching-focussed goal attainment. Further empirical evidence supports the assertion that effective teaching and learning outcomes are achieved largely as a result of high levels of engagement between the teacher and learner across four key stages of the learning process. This *learning alliance* is largely reflective of the phenomenon of the *coaching alliance* (Stober & Grant, 2006; Horvath, 2001; Kemp, 2008, 2011; O’Broin & Palmer,

2010) and hence, warrants an isomorphic transfer from the coaching context to the current anthropological framework being proposed, the four phases of which are presented below.

#### ***Stage 1: Level of the Learner***

The primary task in this first stage involves the coach establishing an optimal learning experience and environment for the coachee, or learner. This involves identifying and evaluating the level of *competence* and *experience* of the learner in the skill or domain they have elected to focus on. Whilst in the current context, this may be the level of exposure to, and past practice of, meditation or mindfulness, the foundations of this phase apply to all areas in which the coachee is intentionally setting specific objectives and goals. This phase is particularly important in order to match the appropriate learning activities and sequence of those activities to the current *experience and capability* level of the learner, her *demonstrable aptitude* in relation to that skill and her current *motivational set* to learn this skill. In the coaching context, clients’ experience of mindfulness meditation practice (MMP) may fall into one of three broad categories; no or minimal exposure, moderate exposure or extensive/deep exposure. For clients in the ‘no or minimal’ category, appropriate activities such as attendance at an introductory meditation workshop, a mindful awareness exercise within a coaching session, an internet search for beginners’ meditation exercises, or a basic practice schedule of breathing and relaxation exercises may be appropriate options as the first progression in their skill acquisition sequence. For those more advanced learners, referral to an experienced meditation teacher or the design of a more disciplined and consistent practice schedule may be most appropriate. As the coach however, the primary focus is to facilitate an effective learning experience for the coachee

within the coaching process. If an external expert is required to be engaged in the learning process at this point, then it is the ethical responsibility of the coach to ensure that this resource is sourced appropriately and effectively deployed. Regardless of the current level of the learner, of primary concern to the experiential educator is enabling the coachee to experience early success in her practices and a sense of achievement and competence that nurtures her motivation to continue to practise and refine her performance and maintain a positive sense of agency.

### **Stage 2: Practice and Participation**

The importance of *motivation* and *agency* in achieving states of positive wellbeing have been highlighted by Deci and Ryan (1995). Further, Spence (2006) has previously identified the central importance of Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT) in achieving efficacious outcomes in coaching. The central tenet of SDT is that at the core of human motivation is an inherently positive drive that seeks to enact effort through one's sense of agency, commitment and striving for personal growth and discovery. These inherent drives serve to meet the innate human needs of *competence*, *relatedness* and *autonomy*.

In addition, Shapiro et al. (2006) highlight three axioms of mindfulness practice; *intention*, *attitude* and *attention*, highlighting that these occur simultaneously and this moment-to-moment process defines mindfulness itself. The first of these, *intention*, is arguably a foundation of not only effective mindfulness practice, but can be considered central to the process of learning, goal setting and goal striving within the coaching engagement. Kabat-Zinn (1994) describes this intention in mindfulness terms as '*on purpose*' (p. 4) meaning that the individual actively engages with mindfulness practice with an expectation that a positively valued outcome will be achieved as a result of her participation. For

many would-be mindfulness practitioners within the coaching context, the likelihood of these intended outcomes being achieved significantly influences their motivation and agency to *practice*. However, in the context of executive coaching for example, the drive for *immediacy*, *impact* and *results*, often within a pure business context, may serve to hinder or truncate any mindfulness practice and impede the positive benefits such as improved job performance (Dane & Brummel, 2013) or leadership (Kinsler, 2014) that result from persistent practice.

Extrapolating from Launder's (2001) 'P's of Perfect Pedagogy', effective learning outcomes are significantly aided by 'plenty of pertinent, progressive practice'. Simply, mindfulness needs to be persistently practised. For mindfulness to be of value to those who practice it, the practice must be consistent, disciplined, paced, sequenced and processed in an experiential context to provide meaning, understanding and corrective feedback. If the novice mindfulness practitioner has an expectation of 'blissful calm' from the moment she takes her first soft-stomach breath, she may be sadly disappointed and disheartened after her first mindfulness exercise. It is the coach who can play an active and directive role here, by redirecting the coachee's focus and mindset, using psychoeducative methods to teach the coachee the process of change and mastery and provide specific corrective feedback at their own level of competency and experience.

### **Stage 3: Consolidation and Consistency**

During the third phase of the coaching engagement, both the coach and coachee are compelled to develop, apply or exhibit a deeper set of mindfulness and learning skills. It is at this point in the learning process where continuous practice may become repetitive and boring. The coach may begin to lose their focus or commitment to the

coachee. Likewise, the coachee may find that she is slipping into a 'comfortable' mode of engagement with the coach. Recognisable patterns begin to emerge in behaviour and engagement style facilitating the emergence and influence of one or more cognitive biases. It is at this point in the alliance that through a collective focus on mindfulness and processing of experience that motivation can be reengaged through progressively more challenging practices, a change in activity focus or through the creativity of the coach in designing novel or innovative learning tasks. By utilising the anthropological approach to coaching, the coach has new freedoms to more proactively engage in the design of the coachee's learning environment and be a more directly active facilitator in the learning journey

#### **Stage 4: Refinement and Mastery**

This phase captures the process of continued practice, feedback provision, refinement of performance and engagement. The methodological importance of *progressive sequencing* is of particular importance during this phase as the learner must continue to be challenged with increasingly more complex and challenging practices to extend and refine her repertoire of skills. In the context of mindfulness, the coachee may now be seeking out progressively more demanding practice exercises and in addition, she may also be seeking progressively more challenging environments, relationships or contexts in which she can apply these skills. Whilst maintaining a central point of focused attention in the confines of a quiet and controlled meditation room with a supportive and caring coach is of vital importance to skill acquisition in its early stages, the application of these skills in the 'real' world is the ultimate objective and at the appropriate point, the coach plays an important role in designing, facilitating and processing these 'real' world practices.

#### **Stage 5: Closure and Maintenance**

An often-overlooked stage in the learning process is the closure phase. In particular, educators and coaches may overlook the importance of reviewing, capturing the narrative of the experiential journey, anchoring progress and current abilities and celebrating successes. Equally, developing self-directed and managed strategies for continuing progression and mastery establishes a plan for future growth that is of critical importance in the perpetually iterative process of lifelong learning. It is here that coach and coachee stand to gain significant retrospective insight and awareness through a review of not only the content covered in the coaching engagement but the unique subjective experiences of each in the laboratory that is created through the coaching alliance. Personal reflection, introspection and supervision each play an important role in maximising the experiential learning outcomes from the unique coaching engagement.

#### **WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

The current chapter has provided a strong justification and validation for the continuation of the use of coaching practice and mindfulness practice as effective methods for supporting human growth, learning and flourishing. In addition, the chapter has drawn attention to their interdependence and their relativity to a long and well established body of knowledge from the field of education, specifically, experiential education. Most importantly, it has proposed the adoption of an integrative experiential education approach to coaching and mindfulness and the opportunity that this integrative framework promises for bringing mindfulness practice together with coaching practice within a rich and rewarding learning environment.

Future research in the field to investigate the unique effects of implementing

an *athrological* approach to coaching and mindfulness is recommended. By adopting a randomised, treatment-control group trial approach to investigating the comparative impacts of unique coaching methods and protocols, valuable insights into both the phenomenology of the coaching engagement and the relative efficacies of methodological approaches will serve to rigorously investigate these theoretical frameworks and inform their development. Likewise, continuing to turn our research attention to the broader outcomes achieved by adopting a structured and consistent practice of mindfulness will further serve to illuminate our understanding of human learning, growth and development.

## CONCLUSION

The chapter has deliberately and overtly issued a challenge to those researchers and practitioners working in the coaching field and with mindfulness. Such is the impact and value that these methods appear to offer, practitioners must be compelled and committed to pursuing their own development and mastery both of athrological methods and mindfulness. To do this, we must extend and build our knowledge, understanding, competency and capability as teachers, educators and mindfulness practitioners. Indeed, so important is this process of self-reflection and development as a coach to achieving similarly efficacious outcomes for the client, that authors such as Silsbee (2008) have designed integrative coaching models and coaching practices for effectively achieving this. By utilising and applying models such as these, practitioners of coaching and mindfulness will be better positioned to support their client's development.

As a theoretical construct, much effort is needed to experiment with and surface the impact and efficacy of adopting a model of coaching derived from anthrology. However, we have presented neither a radical nor

unfounded approach to this integrative challenge in this chapter. Rather, we have illuminated the lost opportunity of overlooking a broad suite of models, methods and research that fall within the discipline of education and highlight experiential and anthrological education as the historical foundation of coaching and mindfulness practice.

By approaching coaching as an anthrological enterprise, and subsequently drawing on the rich and extensive bodies of knowledge that exist across education and teaching, future research with an interdisciplinary approach may illuminate more fully both coaching practice itself and the application of mindfulness as an integral tool to this practice. Likewise, and arguably juxtaposed, the investigation of coaching as an anthrological method may well surface insights currently clouded by definitional rigidity within a future integrated and blended field of practice. A theoretical and conceptual loosening of the boundaries defining coaching, teaching and mindfulness may yet yield valuable methodological and phenomenological insights that can strengthen the potency of these efficacious developmental methods.

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