

CONFERENCE REPORT

Health and Wellbeing at Work Conference: Coaching and Coaching Psychology Stream, 5 March 2019, NEC – Birmingham, UK

Jo Hensel¹

The Health and Wellbeing at Work Conference has been running successfully for 13 years. I chanced upon a flyer for the event earlier in the year, and was amazed at the wealth of eminent speakers which the Conference had attracted to its Coaching and Coaching Psychology Stream which also doubled as an International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP) study day. The ISCP are conference partners in this annual event. As both an experienced coach and an early career researcher, I jumped at the opportunity to attend.

Dr Rachael Skews got the first session of the day “Psychological Flexibility and Coaching at Work” off to an engaging start by inviting delegates to consider whether pie was good, or bad. This was the perfect introduction to the ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) approach to coaching which has its origins in Relational Frame Therapy and seeks to alter coachees’ relationships with their thoughts – increasing psychological flexibility. In the space of forty minutes, Rachael brought the ACT approach to life, sharing various practical tools along the way. One which I couldn’t wait to use was “Tell me about your perfect day”, which not only enables coachees to get into a positive headspace, but also quickly taps into their core values with the question “What are the three non-negotiables in that day?”.

Professor Stephen Palmer was up next with “Tackling Mental Health Issues within a Coaching Context.” As Stephen highlighted at the start of this session, given that mental health

problems affect 1 in 4 people in Britain (MIND, 2016:4) and that 57% of all working days are lost because of issues with mental health (HSE, 2018), it is highly likely that coaches will, at some point, have a client who has mental health issues which raise concerns. The Mental Health Spectrum (based on Huppert et al., 2005) gave a useful backdrop to Stephen’s paper. Given that so few of us are in the “flourishing” zone, what might the role of coaching be in moving us along the spectrum?

Stephen gave some incredibly helpful and pragmatic advice about what to do when a client presents with mental health problems, as well as pointing delegates the ICF’s guidelines: <https://coachfederation.org/blog/referring-a-client-to-therapy> Many of the things which we can do as coaches in this situation keep us in the coaching zone – including being direct and calm; expressing concern and care; pointing out specific behaviours; listening closely; normalizing therapy. In some circumstances, it is possible to use coaching to help a client think through possible options for addressing their mental health problems. Stephen also underlined the importance of Supervision for coaches as well as the importance of re-contracting with our clients if we have been engaged to coach but are qualified to intervene when they want help with mental health issues.

A paper on “The Use of Coaching as a Disability Adjustment” was presented by Dr Nancy Doyle after the refreshment break. This paper provoked some lively discussion. As Nancy was quick to point out, there are many

Corresponding author

Jo Hensel: jo.hensel@gsm.d.ac.uk

Affiliation

¹ Guildhall School of Music & Drama
London, EC2Y 8DT, UK

Copyright

© National Wellbeing
Service Ltd

Funding

None

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest in respect to their authorship or the publication of this paper.

Acknowledgments

None declared

Organiser

Organised by Sterlingevents.co.uk

ethical questions around the definition of “disability” in this context. Very often, the barriers to employees who have been labelled with a disability are in the entry rules rather than in their ability to do the job. A person with dyslexia, for example, may have excellent fine motor skills together with highly developed visual perception and might make an excellent hairdresser or engineer, but many modern apprenticeships require at least GCSE level English before apprentices can start to develop their practical skills. Some companies are still out of step, demanding “all-rounders” rather than embracing neurodiverse employees with the required specialist skills. As companies are increasingly required to be responsive to our fast changing world, innovative thinking becomes an indispensable asset, and many neurodiverse people are brilliant innovative thinkers. Coaching is sanctioned as an adjustment by Access to Work for around 5,000 people per year. Nancy’s research has shown that coaching, combined with fairly standard ‘reasonable adjustments’ improves performance by 43%, as rated by clients and managers, after just four coaching sessions (Doyle & McDowall, 2015). Typically, coaching will address the functional difficulties which clients are facing, rather than the diagnosis – with organisation, memory, time management and stress being frequently requested topics for the focus of the coaching.

The next session was one of two exciting papers which focused on the growth of a coaching culture within an organisation. Jo Channon and Katherine Chowdry presented “Internal Coaching – Making Big Changes” which focused on the development of coaching within the British Transport Police. I was struck by courage, vision and commitment which both Jo and Katherine brought to their work. In the face of a very limited budget, a challenging existing culture and a relatively small and disparate workforce, Jo and Katherine are successfully building up their internal coaching capacity within their Coaching Centre of Expertise which has made them the “go to” resource for other police forces interested in developing their internal coaching. I love the sound of their innovative CPD Coaching events which include lunchtime Coaching board game sessions and “Espresso” coaching sessions which enable coaches to reconnect with each other and with their skills in a time-efficient and engaging way.

Andrea Farrell’s afternoon session “Coaching at a Creative Institution: How we build a Coaching Culture That Aligns With the University’s Values and Teaching Ethos” was equally inspiring as the second of the two conference papers in this stream which focused on the development of a Coaching

Culture within an organisation. Andrea uses Megginson and Clutterbuck’s 4 Levels of Coaching Culture model to identify the next steps for University of the Arts, London, which is well on the way to reaching Level 4 - an embedded coaching culture, with the coaching strategy clearly aligned to both the institutional strategy and the HR People Strategy. Not surprisingly, given the nature of the institution, Andrea and her team have come up with some creative ways to use coaching across the institution – with Coach Roadshows showcasing at the different colleges; the introduction of various creative coaching tools which use eg. coach cards, lego and creative writing; Mentoring and Coaching included in the Staff Development Festival including at a “Lunch and Learn” session. I was most excited, though, by the recently developed Personal and Professional Development Tool for Appraisal – which is being piloted across the institution. It is, essentially, a balance wheel for appraisal. Lucky employees!

Sharing the after-lunch spot which focused on coaching within an educational setting, was Dr Annette Fillery-Travis (Head of the Wales Institute for Work Based Learning, University of Wales Trinity Saint David), who presented on her work “Enhancing Resilience in Senior Leaders in School through Coach Training”. As a backdrop to her work, Annette quoted a DfES study in which “evidence suggests that coaching is by far the most effective form of professional development, when measured by impact on student attainment”. Annette gave a vivid account of her and her team’s reflective practice as they met and responded to the challenges in designing and delivering coach training to senior leaders. As with all the presenters today, Annette’s passion for coaching as well as for teaching and learning, shone through. I wasn’t surprised to hear that on returning from their first couple of days of training, her trainee coaches were so inspired that they wanted to get into action and many went back to work and started coaching immediately, resulting in the need to bring the ethics module forward to day 1 of coach training as well as to introduce supervision early on.

Dr Siobhain O’Riordan’s uplifting paper “Developmental Coaching: Sustaining and Enhancing the Performance of an Ageing Workforce Through Coaching and Coaching Psychology” provided a really positive and thought provoking session towards the end of one of the most varied and stimulating conference days I have ever experienced. Having raised some of the issues around longer working lives – including the importance of the social context and the various different ages which we might consider (chronological / biological / subjective / functional), Siobhain

asserted that within a coaching context, working to support later life transitions is focused on “positive growth” – drawing on resources such as existing skills, networks, knowledge and accrued wisdom. In this context, it was helpful to explore Ellis’ ABC Model – which Siobhain brought to life with a case study of an older worker who felt challenged in trying to get to grips with a new project. Although I am familiar with the ABC model, it was enlightening to see it being used with such clarity in this context.

Dates for the 2020 Health and Wellbeing Conference have been announced (10th and 11th March 2020). At £40 + VAT for an early bird ticket (in 2019), this has to be one of the best value conferences ever – and I will definitely be booking my ticket for next year. With huge thanks to Stephen Palmer, President, International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP) and the team, for hosting such a stimulating event, and for creating such a relaxed and fruitful learning environment in this ISCP stream of the Health and Wellbeing at Work 2019 Conference. ■

References

Doyle, N., & McDowall, A. (2015). Is coaching an effective adjustment for dyslexic adults? *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, Published online: 25 Aug 2015. [dx.doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2015.1065894](https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2015.1065894)

HSE (2018). *Work related stress depression or anxiety statistics in Great Britain, 2018*. Retrieved on 24/3/19 from: www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress.pdf

Huppert, F.A., Baylis, N., & Keverne, B. (Eds.) (2005). *The Science of Well-being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

MIND (2016). *Understanding mental health problems*. Retrieved on 24/3/19 from: www.mind.org.uk/media/3244655/understanding-mental-health-problems-2016.pdf

Weblink

Details about the coaching and coaching psychology stream: <https://www.iscpresearch.org/conferences-congresses-symposia/health-and-wellbeing-at-work-coaching-and-coaching-psychology-5-march-2019/>

Biography

Since graduating from Guildhall School of Music & Drama as a horn player, **Jo Hensel** has enjoyed a fulfilling musical career – touring, performing and recording with many of the UK’s and Europe’s leading orchestras and chamber ensembles. She has been a member of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields since 1998. Throughout her career, Jo has combined her passion for music with a fascination for how people learn and develop, working as a musician and educator in prisons, schools, hospitals, banks and many other community and corporate settings. She gained a BSc (Hons) in Psychology from the Open University in 2000 and in 2012 embarked upon coach training, gaining the ILM Level 7 Diploma in Executive Coaching and Mentoring in 2016. She is a Senior Practitioner of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), and coaches a wide range of clients in the Arts and in Education.

Jo is currently Deputy Head of Wind, Brass and Percussion and a coaching associate at the Guildhall School, where she has just embarked upon a PhD in which she plans to research the impact of Rational Emotive Behaviour Coaching on Conservatoire music students.

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9854-7148>

Citation

Hensel, J. (2019). *Health and Wellbeing at Work Conference: Coaching and Coaching Psychology Stream, 5 March 2019, NEC – Birmingham, UK*. *European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, 3, 4, 1-3. Retrieved from: <http://www.nationalwellbeingsservice.org/volumes/volume-3-2019/volume-3-article-4/>