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Becoming a Profession? - Executive Coaching in Australia

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Work and Organisational Studies

School of Business

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Statement Of Originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Elinor Meredith

ABSTRACT

Since the 1980s, executive coaching for business executives has become one of the fastest growing business service sectors in the economically developed world. However, there is no clear data that identifies the number of individuals claiming to act as executive coaches either nationally or internationally. It has been estimated by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) that there are 30,000 coaches worldwide generating an income of \$1.5 billion. Executive coaches offer services supporting the professional development and attainment of the personal goals of executives. The increased use of executive coaching has resulted in an organisational expenditure that has been estimated in the billions of dollars a year (Brightman, 2003; Sherman & Freas, 2004; Fillery-Travis & Lane, 2006; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008). Given the economic value and growth of such a service, it has naturally attracted many people wishing to position themselves as executive coaches and as experts in the field. It is this growth in executive coaches and coaching in general that has seen the leaders in this field follow a traditional occupational development model of creating occupational associations and now extending this to claim professional status. Despite the claims of the coaching professional associations that executive coaching is a profession, executive coaching remains a fragmented and unregulated occupation, requiring no formal qualifications or experience to practice, or use the term “coach”.

As an early participant of the executive coaching industry I had the opportunity to observe the actions of some members of the professional associations as they created and grew the membership. As the executive coaching industry has grown the leaders of the professional associations have deliberately followed the template of recognised professions, such as medicine and law, with the objective of differentiating executive coaching from other distinct areas of work and other forms of coaching. These actions appeared to be going much further than those undertaken by, for example, the consulting industry (Alvesson & Johansson, 2002), in establishing an area of expertise and exclusivity around their work. There appeared to be a more concerted effort on the part of the coaching industry to establish the value of the product and service they were offering to organisations, while differentiating themselves from other offerings. The efforts of the coaching industry also suggest the intense use of what Watson (2002a)

refers to as “professional talk”. They began to use the rhetoric of professionalization – they were in fact attempting to establish executive coaching as a profession. But interestingly, the professional associations, apart from psychology-based associations have not involved the state in their quest for professionalization. Furthermore, executive coaches and professional associations, have different, and often conflicting, views on what constitutes executive coaching and the necessary qualifications and experience to practice as a coach.

This thesis examines executive coaching from the different aspects of executive coaches, professional associations, educators and trainers and clients. I have used Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings (2002) as they examine the stages of institutional change. Their framework relates to change within an occupation. By using their framework I examine the stages that an occupation goes through to achieve change, in my case to emerge.

A qualitative research method was used, involving semi-structured interviews with 64 professional coach association leaders, executive coaches, coach educators and trainers and coaching clients supported by documents, websites, speeches, articles, the popular press and books. The interviews included Australian based coaches, clients and coach training institutes and Australian and internationally based professional associations.

The thesis suggests the professionalization project undertaken by professional associations of executive coaches emphasises that professionalization is not only a process, but also a strategy used by professional associations as they continually attempt to display a professional image to a variety of audiences. In this thesis I have examined the role of the professional associations, educators and trainers, executive coaches and clients in the attempts to make executive coaching a profession. While I am of the opinion that coaching, executive or otherwise, fails in its attempt to distinguish itself from other occupations, such as consulting, the thesis is not an attempt to study this as a failed attempt at professionalization. But it is an attempt to examine how an emerging occupation can be studied as a form of professionalization that includes complexity and ambiguity. I argue that theories of professionalization need to account for these changes in circumstance. By always looking at existing occupations, such as medicine

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and the law, academics have ignored the rich view that emerging occupations can have on professionalization. The view I have taken has added to this by examining the role of professional organisations as it is emerging.

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DEDICATION

In memory of my darling Gervase – for his love, courage and support

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List of Abbreviations

ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics

AC – Association for Coaching

AHRI – Australian Human Resources Institute

ANZSCO – Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations

APECS – Association for Professional Executive Coaching

APS (IGCP) – Australian Psychology Society Interest Group in Coaching Psychology

BPS (SGCP) – British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology

CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

CTI – Coach Training Institute

COMENSA – Coaches and Mentors of South Africa

EMCC – European Mentoring and Coaching Council

GCC – Global Coaching Convention

GCMA – Global Coaching and Mentoring Alliance

GSAEC – Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching

IAC – International Association of Coaches

IEC - Institute of Executive Coaching

ICCO – International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations

ICF – International Coach Federation

ICFA – International Coach Federation Australia

PDF – Professional Development Foundation

ROI – Return on Investment

USCMA – University of Sydney Coaching and Mentoring Association

WABC – Worldwide Association of Business Coaches

Chapter 1 - Introduction

We do want coaching to be a recognised profession with high standards of best practice and high quality training requirements. Yesterday, anybody can call themselves a coach, anybody can call themselves a consultant, but when people start knowing the difference between a name and a profession that's when you will make huge leaps.

Dr. Patrick Williams - 'The Future of Professional Coaching: Taking a Stand for Quality' ICF Australasia Regional Conference 2005

Our longstanding fascination with law and medicine has obscured the blunt fact that most professional work is new work. (Abbott, 1988, p.144)

Introduction

Wales (2002) claims there would be very few people in consulting or management who have not noticed the surge in executive coaching. Globally, organisations are now using executive coaching as a way of dealing with complex situations and as an alternative to conventional executive development (Jarvis, 2004; Kilburg, 1996a; Smith and Sandstrom, 1999a; Bluckert, 2004). Executive coaching is the provision of one-to-one support for individuals or members of teams. When it appeared in organisations in the 1990s it was initially dismissed as another management fad. However, it has survived the “fad tag” and is now a global industry. The increased use of executive coaching to achieve professional and personal goals; has resulted in organisational spending on coaches, as being estimated in billions of dollars (Brightman, 2003; Sherman and Freas, 2004; Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006; Liljenstrand and Nebeker, 2008). However, in the words of leadership author Jay Conger:

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Coaching is one of the great gold rushes in the field of leadership development. Indeed ‘thar is gold in them hills’ but no one really knows which hills. To make matters more complicated, the techniques are still being worked out. (Jay Conger quoted in McDermott et al, 2007, p. 31)

As an early participant, and observer of the coaching industry, with specific focus on executive coaching, I had the opportunity to observe the actions of the leaders of the emerging coaching occupation as they created coaching professional associations¹. The objective of these professional associations was to attract new members and promote coaching as a viable and worthwhile occupation and service.

As the occupation of coaching gained acceptance, specialist groups such as executive and business coaches emerged. Executive and business coaches saw themselves as different from other occupations, such as management consultants, but also different from other *coaches*, namely life coaches. Therefore, executive and business coaches formed their own specialist associations and, to promote their cause, their own professional associations. The focus of this thesis is the actions and strategies of professional associations² representing the specialist group, executive coaching, as they pursued recognition as a profession.

The initial studies of professions (Flexner, 1915; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, (1933) 1964; Goode, 1957; Greenwood, 1957; Millerson, 1964; Etzioni, 1969) were interested in seeking what were the essential criteria that make an occupation a profession. These studies were trying to work out what “is” a profession. Despite these efforts it was considered by the majority of the studies, and the balance of opinion, to be a futile task as there was no one element that all of the professions had in common. Hughes (1958) pointed out that the question should not be about what “is” a profession, but *why* do occupations want to turn themselves into professional people. To answer this question many researchers (Freidson, 1986; Johnson, 1972; Roth, 1974) began to focus on issues

¹ Within this thesis the term “professional association” refers to the organisations claiming to represent the occupation of coaching and related coaching sub-specialisations such as executive coaching. The term “professional associations” is used, as this is the term the leaders of the coaching occupation adopted when creating these organisations.

² When referring to the actions and strategies of professional associations, I am referring to the decisions and actions undertaken by leaders of those professional associations.

such as income, status and control over their work, in order to understand why occupations will seek to become professions.

First, with regard to income, most members of occupations that traditionally have managed to be viewed as professions, for example doctors and lawyers, are believed to enjoy high incomes. Another reason for seeking professional status may be the prestige that traditional occupations typically enjoy. People aspire to professional status because they believe they will be respected. A third reason as to why occupations want to turn themselves into a profession, relates to power. In particular, the traditional professions typically have been able to determine and to judge the criteria for performing their own work.

Typically, attempts to be seen as professional involve activities that lead to social closure (Larson, 1977). Social closure is a process whereby groups claim desirable social or economic resources, to the exclusion of other groups. With regard to social closure in occupations, particularly professionalization, the activities in which occupations engage involve boundary setting, establishing a qualifying process and professional identity. For these reasons the chapters 4, 5 and 6 in this thesis have been called Boundary Setting, The Qualifying Process and Professional Identity, as these are the main components of social closure with regard to occupations.

I wish to make it clear that while the thesis is examining the professionalisation strategies of an emerging occupation, I do not suggest that there is a category of professions that has an essential reality. This thesis is not about whether emerging occupations really are professions or not, it is about their attempts to be viewed as a profession.

The need for the study

As the coaching industry grew, the leaders of the coaching associations sought to distinguish coaching from other occupations. This primarily took the form of portraying coaching as a “profession”, consciously adopting some, but not all (the exception was

the use of a license granted by the state), of what they understood to be the occupational models of traditional professions such as medicine and law.

By way of comparison, the actions by the leaders of the executive coaching professional associations in striving for this objective appear to have taken a more exclusive approach than the closely aligned consulting industry³ (Alvesson & Johansson, 2002), in establishing an area of expertise and exclusivity around their work. There appears to be a more concerted effort by the leaders of the executive coaching professional associations on behalf of executive coaching to establish the value of the product of coaching and the service coaching offers to organisations, while differentiating themselves from other offerings.

The efforts of the leaders of executive coaching also suggest the intensive use of what Watson (2002a) refers to as “professional talk” (p. 96). These leaders began to use the rhetoric⁴ of professionalization – they were attempting to position executive coaching as a profession through persuasion of their key stakeholders.

Executive coaching offers an interesting case to explore the increasing significance of knowledge workers, many of whom are operating as independent contractors, during the 1990s – 2000s. Throughout the 1990s-2000s important changes occurred to knowledge work and knowledge workers that, as Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002) say, had become a significant part of the economy. Organisational managements have been responding to the changes that have come from institutional investors, such as large pension funds, and the requirements for profits in the short term (Gilmore et al, 1997; Useem, 1998; Kochan, 2002). This left the managers with two choices, produce greater revenues, which can be more difficult to achieve in the short term, or cut costs, which means downsizing, de-layering or outsourcing parts of the organisation. Cost cutting is a much faster method of reaching these goals (Kochan, 2002). Yet at the same time the work

³ Given the similarity of work between coaching and consulting the leaders of coaching professional associations, in particular executive coaching, have focused their attention on differentiating themselves from consultants who have in the past attempted to be recognised as a profession.

⁴ The use of rhetoric is taken from Jackson (1999, p. 358) quoting Burke (1962) as “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents”. It also includes Kleinman and Fine (1979, p. 272) quoting Ball (1970) as being “a set of symbols functioning to communicate a particular set of meanings, directed and organized toward the representation of a specific image or impression”.

that has to be done has not diminished. The groups that have been downsized, de-layered and outsourced, have included knowledge workers. These knowledge workers, who previously had been inside organisations, now found themselves outside organisations, and more importantly they were looking for work.

There are many authors who have written about change. For example authors such as Di Maggio and Powell (1983) look at change that occurs at an organisation level. Their perspective is one of change at a societal level. As they state organisations are competing for political and social power, as well as economic fitness. Organisations operate within “fields” (p.148), and these fields include suppliers, regulatory agencies, consumers and other organisations that produce similar products. But, once the field of the organisation is established, change, when it occurs, tends to be similar across organisations, that is, it tends to be homogenic. In other words change tends to be similar across organisations rather than different. Others, such as Stacey (1996), examined change that occurred within an organisation. He examined changes to levels and functions within an organisation, not at a societal level. While these are useful ways to examine change they did not reflect the changes I was seeing within organisations, and why these organisations are using executive coaching for their senior management.

I have found that a more useful way to understand the changes discussed in this thesis is a framework that has been developed by Greenwood et al (2002). While most analyses of change focus on organisations, Greenwood et al (2002) focus on changes within occupations. Their study has particular applicability to the professions, as their empirical research was on accountants in Canada. The framework can help understand why it is that emerging occupations seek to enhance their own position in terms of the issues of income, prestige and control over work. Specifically, Greenwood et al (2002) point to the way that occupations can enhance their positions by claiming to have new solutions to organisational problems. Their framework conceptualised occupational change in terms of a number of phases. In particular, occupations can present organisations with new solutions to problems (what Greenwood et al (2002) refer to as the phase of Pre-institutionalization) and then provide justifications for why these are the best solutions (what Greenwood et al (2002) refer to as the phase of Theorization).

As noted below, movement through all six phases in the framework is neither necessary nor inevitable.

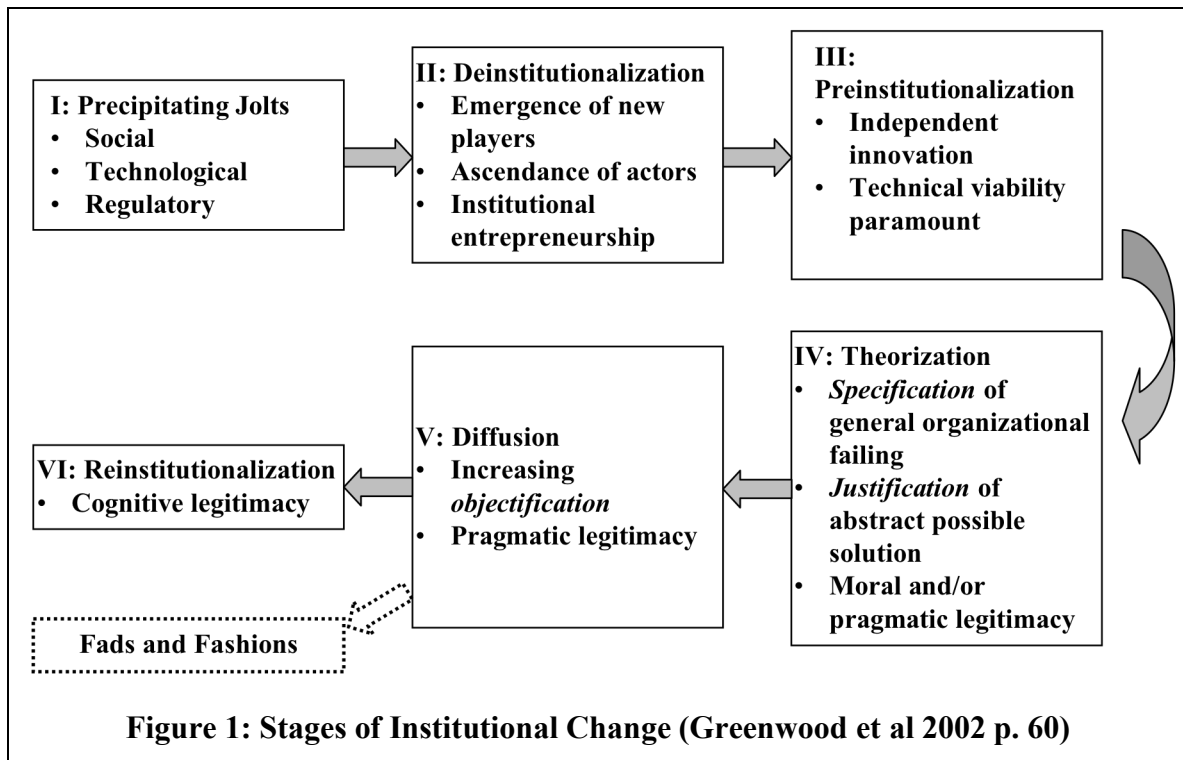
According to Greenwood et al (2002) institutional change is precipitated by what they call stage 1, 'jolts' to organisations. Jolts destabilize established practices and may be found in what Greenwood et al (2002) refer to as social upheaval, technological disruptions, competitive discontinuities or regulatory change. The term social upheaval does not necessarily mean a major event such as war or famine. Rather, it can refer to more gradual changes such as the growth of shareholder activism on the part of large institutional investors requiring organisations to generate greater shareholder returns in the short term (Gilmore et al, 1997; Useem, 1998; Kochan, 2002). Furthermore, the highly disruptive technological changes that have occurred in recent decades have had an impact on organisations. Watson (2003) states, technological changes "can do neither good nor harm to human beings – it is what human beings do to themselves and to each other with machinery that is crucial" (p.64). Management may, through the use of computers, increase their span of control (Watson, 2003). By increasing their span of control it allows them to decrease the levels of management within the organisations, often referred to as de-layering. While all of the pressures mentioned by Greenwood and his colleagues have had an impact on organisations, the main "jolts" at which I will be looking are greatly increased requirements for organisations to operate successfully in terms of short term financial metrics to satisfy institutional investors and technological disruptions.

Greenwood et al's (2002) institutional change model has been selected as it offers a useful framework for examining the changes that occur within organisations, and how these changes affect or impact on the occupations with which we are concerned. For example, if an organisation has outsourced its training and development, it now needs to look outside the organisation to provide this service. Therefore, the organisation may use executive coaches for aspects of staff development. This *has* been the case for executive coaches, and what I will examine is how the professional associations of executive coaches reacted to these changes, and their attempts to position executive coaches as an alternative to conventional executive development.

The framework that Greenwood et al (2002) develop conceives of institutional change in terms of a number of stages (see Figure 1). These are outlined as follows: Stage 1 as we have seen, involves the impact of Precipitating Jolts. These jolts, as listed above, are social upheaval (which include pressures towards “short termism” in organisations) or technological disruptions, with the main consequences being, in this case, downsizing, de-layering and outsourcing. I shall be discussing these jolts and their consequences later in this chapter. The second stage discussed by Greenwood et al (2002) is De-institutionalisation. By this they mean the emergence of new actors in an industry or across a range of industries. The emergence of the new occupation of executive coaching can be seen as a development at this stage of institutional change. Stage 3 of the framework is Pre- institutionalisation. In this part of the change process the new emergent players, in this case executive coaches and more importantly the professional associations, will seek innovation and technically viable solutions to change. Thereby establishing themselves as having the answers to, what are considered to be, locally perceived problems. Following on from this is Stage 4 - Theorisation, where new actors justify the moral and practical legitimacy of their approach by claiming and specifying how organisations are failing, and how the actors can provide effective solutions. It is at this stage where professional associations attempt to justify, through rhetoric, the changes they seek to introduce. This should lead to Stage 5 Diffusion – what Greenwood et al refer to as “increasing objectification”, by this they mean that the changes that have been proposed in Stage 4 become accepted and therefore deliver pragmatic legitimacy. This leads to Stage 6 Re-institutionalisation, where this new method is not only accepted, but it has become universally accepted, taken-for-granted, and so the new method develops cognitive legitimacy. In terms of the Greenwood et al model, I do not believe that the changes sought by the executive coaching professional associations have reached these last two stages. It can be argued that where change of the type sought by executive coaching leaders are not fully institutionalised, they may simply become fads and fashions, a point to which I will briefly return.

This thesis will examine executive coaching in terms of all of the stages of the Greenwood et al model, but in particular will concentrate on Stage 3 and Stage 4, where the leaders of the professional associations of executive coaching are focusing their attention to achieve a status of “profession” for the occupation. However, I will first

look at Stages 1 and 2, where organisations are facing jolts, how organisations dealt with these jolts by initiatives such as downsizing, de-layering and outsourcing, how the affected particular aspects of knowledge work such as management development, and how this created space for the growth of distinct occupations such as executive coaching.



Precipitating Jolts to Organisations

Organisations are increasingly evaluated using short-term metrics involving balance sheets, bottom lines, market shares, revenues and shareholder value (Svensson and Wood, 2005). Where firms are facing cost pressures, the use of short-term metrics may result in organisations wanting to downsize so that they can cut costs quickly. Kochan (2002) argues that, “executives discovered that they could turn to layoffs not as a strategy of last resort but as a preemptive strike to ensure that future earnings would not be compromised” (p.140). Sennett (1998) refers to this as “no long term” (p.31) commitment to employees, which creates uncertainty and therefore in turn limits the

amount of trust and commitment to the organisation (Sennett, 1998; Whitener et al, 1998; Whitener, 2001; Allen et al 2003; Edgar and Geare, 2005; Vanhala et al, 2011).

Organisations often find that downsizing, de-layering and outsourcing to meet these “short-term” pressures for market shares, revenues and shareholder returns, can have adverse consequences. Downsizing and de-layering will often leave organisations with too few managers who are now required to meet shareholder expectations of increased returns. Linstead, Fulop and Lilley (2009, p.1) quote Gibson Burrell, who describes this downsizing and outsourcing as “corporate liposuction”, where managers are now required to work harder and smarter, but with no guarantee of job security. Furthermore, as Kissler (1994, p.335) points out, organisations may have lost “brains” rather than “fat”. The organisation might find that even by using terms such as downsizing or de-layering, it can depersonalise the working environment. This depersonalisation might cause the people who work in the organisation to feel that they are “expendable human resources”. Indeed under the pressure of these changes, the managers that organisations value and want to retain, might seek to work elsewhere.

Rousseau (1998) suggests that by strengthening and reinforcing perceptions of organisational membership, employees are more likely to stay with the organisation. This is supported by Whitener (2001), who states that employers who can demonstrate flexibility in areas such as selective staffing, developmental appraisal, competitive and equitable compensation, and comprehensive training and development, have a high commitment policy to their staff. Festing et al (2013) call this “long-termism”, where an organisation will seek to attract, select, develop and retain key talented employees as part of their talent management.

Thus, organisations often face two conflicting pressures – one, keep staff levels down, and two, retain valued employees. While this would appear to be contradictory, they are in fact what human resources (HR) specialists have to deal with - keeping people happy yet keeping the organisation lean.

However, it is the outsourcing of work that is of particular interest to this thesis, as outsourcing of human resource activities allowed for the emergence of executive

coaches. This “lean production” model of human resource management has resulted in make-or-buy decisions for organisations. Gospel and Sako (2010) state that when an organisation decides that it wants to buy, rather than make, a process in-house, it is outsourcing the activity. In human resource management, organisations are asking what are the make-or-buy issues, what can be outsourced to independent suppliers. Payroll, employee data, and training and development are often amongst those that are outsourced. For the emergence of executive coaching, it is the outsourcing of training and development that has had the greatest impact.

The emergence of new actors - executive coaching and their professional associations

In downsizing, de-layering and outsourcing some of their processes, organisations were encouraged by consultants, such as McKinsey and Company consulting group. However, having downsized, de-layered and outsourced various staff and functions, many of these organisations were facing “people” shortages. McKinsey and Company termed these people shortages, the “war for talent”.

Chambers et al (1998) from McKinsey and Company coined the term, “War for Talent”, based on their assessment that organisations were reporting a trend of talent shortages, in part related to the technology boom in the mid to late 1990s. As their opening states, “Tell me again: Why would someone really good want to join your company? And how will you keep them for more than a few years? Yes, money does matter. ... Better talent is worth fighting for.” (p. 44).

However, many authors (Malik and Singh, 2014; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Cappelli, 2005; Pfeffer, 2001) argue that the “war for talent” was a fad, and was used by consultants as a way of getting business from worried executives. Regardless of the fact that its reality was questionable, many managers and non-academic commentators were convinced that it was real, and acted accordingly. As we will see, that acceptance by

managers had real consequences. Therefore the term “war for talent” will be treated as a reality *believed* by managers.

Following the influential McKinsey’s articles, a plethora of works have appeared, with the message that the “war” is a reality and *talent management* was raised as a concern (see Axelrod et al., 2002; Gardner, 2005; Michaels et al., 2001). Whilst there is no single agreed definition of “talent management” (see Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Tarique and Schuler, 2010), Tarique and Schuler’s (2010) definition, in the context of multinational firms, identifies key elements of the term relating to the war for talent.

...is about systematically utilizing IHRM activities (complementary HRM policies and policies) to attract, develop, and retain individuals with high levels of human capital (e.g., competency, personality, motivation) consistent with the strategic directions of the multinational enterprise in a dynamic, highly competitive, and global environment (p.124).

Gardner (2005) argues that organisations seek to develop their capabilities by competing for high performing employees, or human capital. The purpose is to improve their competitive position, and also to reduce their competitors’ opportunity to do the same. It was argued by Hall (1995) that organisations, by focusing on executive employee retention, could keep at bay the people shortages. Yet, having downsized and de-layered their management, and outsourced their training and development functions, organisations found it difficult to develop their talent without the skills previously found internally. With little or no capacity to develop management talent internally, organisations began to look outside, and executive coaching emerged as one way of filling this gap (Sherman and Freas, 2004), consistent with stage 2 of Greenwood et al’s (2002) framework in which new players can be expected to emerge to deal with organisational problems. Thus organisations have been able to “buy in” the capacity to develop their managers on a just-in-time basis. However, Cassidy and Medsker (2009) and Levenson (2009) caution that the use of executive coaches must be seen as *one tool* within the talent development process. Yet both the executive coaches and their professional associations saw this differently, viewing executive coaching as the *answer*. As Evered and Selman (1989) state, “people work with a coach, they commit to

producing a result, such as improving the level of performance” (p. 21). They believed that providing executive coaching, rather than classroom training, would provide managers with the capacity to deliver the results needed, and therefore to keep these managers within the organisation.

Coaching emerged from the wider occupation of consulting. The provision of executive coaching, developed within the USA, became the latest “new” approach for consultants. As such, executive coaching was taken up by many consultants and was used as an activity they could offer to their clients. However, Sturdy (1997a) views consulting as an “insecure business” (p.389). More importantly he notes that this expenditure on consultancy is discretionary. He argues that consultants are aware of how their clients may react, either positively or negatively, to the proposed solution to a problem, and part of this response may include ongoing work within the organisation. Therefore, to ensure this ongoing work, consultants will offer what they consider to be “the latest” in consulting, and in this case it may be that executive coaching is used as an alternative, or answer, to a problem. While coaching predominantly came out of the consulting industry, it soon attracted members of other occupations, such as psychology and retired executives.

Within Australia, executive coaching has emerged since the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. Coaching moved away from a negative image, that coaching was offered to the coachee as a last chance, to a more positive viewpoint. This change from “coaching” to “positive coaching”, where a coachee is viewed as having a future with the organisation, gained momentum within organisations and the coaching community.

Despite this expansion of coaching there has been very little written about the early stages of executive coaching in Australia. In fact there is very little written about the origins of coaching from around the world. Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) have stated that what is available are “brief statements or speculations” (p.207) in relation to what has happened in the development of coaching.

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

In Australia, specialist coaching services began to emerge. Within the business world, Results Coaching, founded by David Rock, an Australian, started in 1998. This was also the year that the American based CoachU established their Australian arm. In 1999 the ICF became prominent player by creating their Australian division (Brock, 2008). Universities also became aware of coaching, and they began to offer degrees based around coaching. The first was the University of Sydney, by offering a Masters degree in HRM and Coaching, and a Graduate Diploma in Science with a speciality in coaching, in 2000, with both of these courses based in the psychology department.

Brock (2012) states that coaching emerged with a “short, yet explosive history” (p.24). She argues that coaching emerged as a distinctive occupation because many of the early coaches formed linkages around the world. Therefore, no one can “own” coaching because, despite being from different countries and different fields, coaching emerged simultaneously around the world. So while Grant and Cavanagh (2004) say “that no existing professions holds a corner on the market of coaching knowledge” (p.2), Clutterbuck (2008) claims the different viewpoints of coaching and their practices has meant that coaching has not produced a coherent framework and that what is occurring is a “land-grab” (p.9).

The academic articles that have been produced are predominantly from the psychology approach to executive coaching. It was Dr. Anthony Grant, along with and Dr. Michael Cavanagh, who were instrumental in establishing the Australian Psychological Society (Interest Group Coaching Psychology) (APS (IGCP)). And it was these two, Grant and Cavanagh, who stated that it was the publication of peer reviewed articles in psychology based publications, such as *Consulting Psychology: Theory, Research and Practice*, and the *International Coaching Psychology Review* that meant coaching and the coaching psychology, was commanding a prominent stance within the business community (Grant, 2008).

Some writers have been sceptical of executive coaching, particularly those that write from a conventional Human Resource Development (HRD) perspective. Hamlin et al (2008) claim that many activities that previously were undertaken by internal HRD

specialists, are now being performed by external coaches. As they argue that HRD includes,

...performance improvement, individual and organisational effectiveness, behaviour change, enhancing individual and organisational learning, developing knowledge, skill and competencies, and enhancing human potential and personal growth (p.297).

As they suggest, because coaching is doing these same activities, coaching is taking this developmental role from HRD. Furthermore, they argue that HRD encompasses many activities, of which coaching is one, and therefore coaching should be part of HRD. But to date the belief that coaching should be part of an internal HRD function has not gained any acceptance from executive coaches. Yet, not all HR professionals are as sceptical as one might expect from Hamlin et al's (2008) viewpoint. For example Dagley (2006), in interviews with 17 HR professionals in Australia, found that they expressed views that were favourable to executive coaching. Furthermore, the HR professionals believed that, as a tool to develop staff, it was worth the expense.

Organisations need to ask "make" or "buy" questions about HR, as they do with all other organisational functions. With the downsizing of management, which reduces the capacity of organisations to development management skills among their people, they find that they need to outsource training and development activities that were previously performed in house. Therefore organisations are now "buying in" coaching rather than "making it". Executive coaching is particularly prevalent for senior managers, and so organisations need to ensure that coaching is seen to be independent from the organisation. Therefore, and they may chose to "buy in" a coach from outside the organisation in order to satisfy senior management.

Who are the executive coaches?

Executive coaches have come from a variety of other occupations such as management consultants, psychologists, technologists and retired executives who have either added coaching to their service offerings or are calling themselves coaches (Grant, 2001; Gale et al, 2002; Liljenstrand and Nebeker, 2008). As stated earlier coaching, which includes executive coaches, has been estimated by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) at 30,000

coaches worldwide generating income of \$1.5 billion. However, there are no estimates on how many executive coaches there are in Australia. Given the economic value and growth of such a service, it has naturally attracted many people wishing to position themselves as executive coaches and as experts in the field (Gale et al, 2002). Most coaches or executive coaches work as sole traders or partnerships with a few being employed in large groups. Natale and Diamante (2005) state that executive coaching aspires to cover:

...achievement of both professional and personal goals, sales increase, client retention increase, higher level of employee satisfaction, promotions, productivity increase, organisational and communication effectiveness enhancement, success of team collaboration, profitability increase, transformation of individuals and teams, greater effectiveness though self-knowledge – a new level of personal mastery, the ability to inspire and enable higher levels of performance and satisfaction in others, ability to initiate and lead necessary cultural change through the recognition of relationships and patterns in the organisation, ability to make quick and better decisions, higher level of openness, avoiding defensive behavior and creating powerful, effective relationships, and ability to move onto greater and more complex responsibilities among others (p.363).

However, Natale and Diamante (2005) go on to say that despite these “grand statements” there is little evidence that supports these claims. Nevertheless, Natale and Diamante (2005) apparently *do* believe in the claims, and are hoping that research into these areas will find the support necessary to demonstrate the efficacy of executive coaching.

Despite many initial reservations about coaching, such as being “paid friends”, “a sounding board”, “the latest executive accessory”, or “pinstripe counselling” (Jarvis, 2004, p.8), coaches are now widely accepted in private and public sector organisations. Authors such as Hall et al (1999) claim that executives need help to make necessary changes and often are looking for someone to “speak the unspeakable” (p. 40).

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

Executive coaches proudly proclaim that coaching can be linked all the way back to Socrates (Bennett, 2006; Williams, 2006; Neenan, 2009). West and Milan (2001) state that executive coaching has been practiced for much longer than it has been named “coaching” and that many consultants and trainers claim to have been coaching for years without using the term. These claims were of course helped by executive coaching gaining widespread attention within the popular press, particularly in America, where it started, and so it became adopted into the lexicon of business (Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck, 1999).

Despite the growing interest in executive coaching, there is little, if any, discussion on whether coaching is a legitimate form of training within organisations (Cassidy and Medsker, 2009; Levenson, 2009). As Levenson (2009) points out, executive coaching, while accepted by organisations as having a positive impact, does not necessarily mean that executive coaching always has the beneficial outcomes it claims. As he states, most coaching is likely to have a positive impact, but since there is often no control group who did not received coaching, these claims may be overstated and can impact on the long term legitimacy of executive coaching.

Jones, Rafferty and Griffin (2006) have examined the trend of using executive coaching as a way of developing leadership within organisations, and argue that the use of executive coaching will assist with required self-development for employees. Lee and Frisch (2011) have argued that executive coaching is “providing *tailored*, just-in-time development to busy leaders” (Lee and Frisch, 2011 italics mine). They argue that providing a tailored approach, rather than a standardized, cookie-cutter training program, is what executive coaching provides, and that this is what human resource specialists want. DeGeest and Brown (2011), approaching this from a Human Resource Development perspective, argue that it is the learning that leaders and managers achieve by working, rather than classroom activities, that makes the beneficial outcomes possible. Evered and Selman (1989) state:

The advantages of coaching have not gone unnoticed by corporate managers who realize that: (1) individuals and teams generally perform better with a coach, (2) superior individual and team performance in business readily translates into productivity and profits, and (3) the quality of coaching makes a big difference

in the results produced. (p. 20)

However, there is a lack of precision in claims about the benefits of coaching, as it is a fragmented and unregulated occupation, and unclear exactly who and what is being discussed. Over time it became apparent that executive coaches and the professional associations that claim to represent them have different, and often conflicting, views on what constitutes executive coaching and the necessary qualifications and experience to practice as a coach. There are no formal qualifications or experience required to practice, and no restrictions on the use of the term “coach” (Brotman et al, 1998).

A significant event in the development of the occupation was the establishment of groups of individuals (usually this was through coach training programs) to distribute information about coaching. These groups, under the tutelage of the coach training organisations, became interested in establishing an association for coaches, so that coaches could discuss practical issues such as techniques or methods. It was from these beginnings that professional associations started to emerge. Initially the professional associations’ role was to attract new members and promote coaching as a viable and worthwhile occupation, but the leaders of these groups began to see the need to protect and control who could call themselves coaches. It is from this that emerged the aspiration, and concrete efforts, to establish coaching as a distinctive profession.

There are a number of other actors, including practicing coaches, educators and trainers, as well as clients, who have an interest in the professionalising of coaching, and these will be introduced later in the thesis. However, for the moment it is the professional associations on which I shall focus my study, specifically why they are seeking to professionalise the occupation and how they are, or are not, achieving this.

Professional associations

The establishment of professional associations was not the initial reason for encouraging groups of coaches to meet and discuss coaching techniques and processes, indeed the American coach education and training market preceded the professional

associations by a number of years. For example the Hudson Institute Santa Barbara was founded in 1986, the Coach Training Institute (CTI) in 1992 and CoachU in 1992. So while it did not start out as a professional association per se, it morphed or transpired, into being a professional association for coaches and the subsequent rules and regulations associated with these activities.

These early associations were small, mostly made up of practising coaches and were based in the USA. The International Coach Federation (ICF) was established in 1995, as the owner of CoachU, Thomas Leonard, believed that coaching needed a representative body to cover the needs of coaches. The use of International in the name was deliberate, as Leonard envisioned a global member base, despite the ICF initially having a USA member base (www.coachfederation.org accessed 3/3/09). Approximately a year later the Personal and Professional Coaching Association, which had been started by the Coach Training Institute (CTI), also joined the ICF (www.coachfederation.org accessed 3/3/09). Membership at this time was very small, but consisted of dedicated practising coaches, and the organisation grew until it had over 8,000 members in sixty-four countries in 2005, and over 10,000 members in ninety-five countries in 2009 (www.coachfederation.org accessed 3/3/09). It is noteworthy that there is a difference between the ICF member numbers and PwC reported coach numbers of some 30,000. If the PwC numbers are correct, it indicates the potential apathy or reluctance of practicing coaches to join a professional association.

The number of professional associations has grown rapidly from the early 1990s to now. Within Australia there are two main groups, the International Coach Federation Australia (ICFA) and the Australian Psychological Society (Interest Group Coaching Psychology) (APS (IGCP)). There are other professional associations, such as, the Australasian Institute of Professional Coaches, but as these are no longer active only the ICFA and the APS (IGCP) are examined in this thesis. There are approximately 1300 members of the ICFA (www.icfaustralia.com accessed 15/12/12), though how many of these are executive coaches is not known, as these statistics are not available. The APS (IGCP) does not specify how many of the coaches are executive coaches, but as the majority of the coaches are writing about executive coaching in the journals that are published, I have assumed that the APS – IGCP do fit into the category.

These professional associations fit into three broad categories. First are those that cater more broadly to coaches, trainers, educators and clients, such as the ICF/ICFA. Second are the professional associations that cater specifically to executive coaching, such as the International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations (ICCO). Third are the psychology-based associations, such as the APS, that specifically cater to psychologists who are active in executive coaching. In an association such as the ICF or ICCO, there are members who are registered psychologists, therefore they may have psychologists as members, but it is not *for* psychologists. However, membership of the APS is strictly limited to psychologists. The APS have established special interest groups within the society and using the establishment of journals and the running of public conferences, are attempting to offer an alternative view of the need for some specific psychology training if you wish to call yourself a coach.

In 2004 the United Kingdom's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) undertook a review of coaching within the UK, and one area on which they focused was the role of the coaching associations. While the CIPD did believe that a single representative body for coaching would be useful, there was "still a degree of rivalry and vying for status and position" (Jarvis, 2004, p.14).

The focus of this thesis is on why these professional associations of executive coaches are seeking professional status, and how examining the jolts that affect organisations, how they approach "make or buy" questions, and the effects of hollowing out particular organisational functions provide a context for the research questions I have asked. I will be using the Greenwood et al (2002) stages of institutional change framework to understand the claims made by the associations, and the actions they have taken in seeking to fulfil them. Focusing on stage 3 of the framework - pre-institutionalisation, I will be examining how the associations are attempting to set boundaries to distinguish themselves from other occupations, and also the use of credentialing in an attempt to limit entry to the occupation. This will be followed by the process described in stage 4 of the framework – theorisation, as the professional associations use the rhetoric of professionalization, to their stakeholders - trainers and educators, practicing executive coaches and their clients.

Conclusion

In comparison to research into established professions and occupations, there has been relatively little critical work carried out into the strategies used by emerging occupations wishing to professionalise. Saks (2010, p.905) argues that the traditional “professions-centric” approach used by analysts in looking at professions has meant that more recent professionalising groups have been little researched. There have been only a few works or articles written about the purported professionalization projects of emerging occupations such as marketing, homoeopathy, therapeutic massage, management consulting or financial services (see Cant and Sharma, 1995; Clarke, 1999; Clark and Fincham, 2002; Oerton, 2004; Enright, 2006). Therefore it is not surprising that there is little critical analysis of executive coaching as an occupation, and little or no examination of executive coaching as a “profession”. This thesis, then, addresses this lack of critical work on emerging occupations by examining the professionalization actions of professional associations of coaching and executive coaches.

The central questions of this thesis are:

- Why do some members of emerging knowledge intensive occupations, such as executive coaching, want to have the occupation recognised as a profession?
- Compared with traditional occupations that are commonly considered to be professions, what are the deliberate actions and strategies, both actual and rhetorical, that emerging occupations have used in their attempts to be considered professions, and what have they omitted and why?
- How can we explain the success or otherwise of emerging occupations in their quest for professional status?

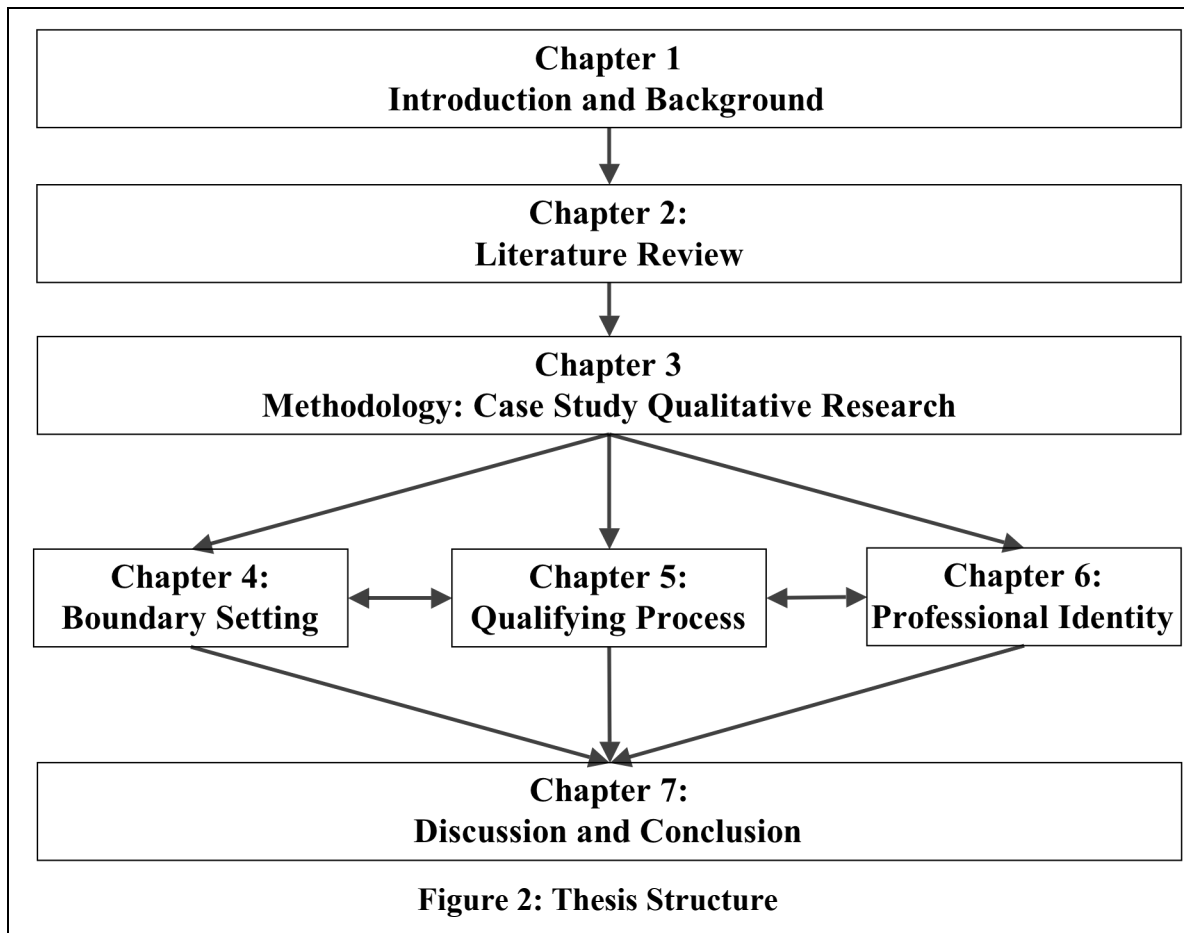
It should be noted I have taken a social constructionist approach in this thesis.

Professionalisation is a strategy designed to produce certain perceptions about the occupation on the part of key actors, like governments and the population more widely.

Occupational members do this in the belief that successfully changing these perceptions will make it more likely that they will enjoy higher incomes, higher prestige and greater ability to control their work. As indicated earlier, the activities in which occupations engage in striving for professionalization creates social closure, giving them jurisdiction over particular areas of knowledge and tasks. I reiterate what I said earlier, that I am looking at professionalization strategies, but I am not suggesting that the term professional implies an essential reality. In other words, an occupation becomes a profession when other people believe it to be a profession. This thesis is not about whether emerging occupations really are professions or not, it is about their attempts to be viewed as a profession.

This thesis is structured as per Figure 2.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the problem and the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature and presents the conceptual framework for the study. The theoretical focus is on the sociology of the professions, specifically related to the professionalization project of emerging occupations seeking professional status and its relationship to the theory of institutional change. Chapter 3 presents a description of the methodology. The empirical focus is on executive coaches, and the strategies and rhetoric employed by leaders of the executive coach associations in their claim that executive coaches are a profession. Chapter 4 describes the strategies and rhetoric used by coach leaders and responses by other actors as they attempt to set new boundaries for executive coaching. Chapter 5 describes the qualifying processes established by the coaching professional associations and responses by other actors. Chapter 6 describes the rhetorical strategies employed to argue that executive coaching is a profession. Chapter 7 discusses the findings and implications for emerging occupations seeking professional status. This process is supported by both reflection on action as I explored the literature and in action as I examined the case data.



Chapter 2

Profession, Professionalization and Professionalism for Emerging Occupations

...by assuming the outward appearance of a profession – including the rhetorical language, the career rewards, and the dignified style of client interaction – even as they avoided the most confining elements of professional status like state regulation, individual accreditation, and, most remarkably, professional liability. (McKenna, 2006, p. 248).

Introduction

The first chapter dealt with what Greenwood et al (2002) referred to as stage 1 phenomena, which they term external jolts, such as social and technological changes, that are likely to lead to stage 2 events, change in organisations and occupations. It also examined how organisations responded to some of the more recent challenges by downsizing, de-layering and outsourcing some of the organisation's employees and functions, though the amount of work required by organisations did not diminish. Greenwood et al (2002) indicate that these jolts can often lead to the emergence of new actors, in this case executive coaches.

As organisations responded to these external jolts by downsizing, de-layering and most importantly, outsourcing, they found that their actions had unintended consequences. In particular many authors (Pfeffer, 2001; Baron et al, 2002; Horowitz et al, 2003), including consultants (Chambers et al, 1998; Axelrod et al, 2002), began to claim that organisations needed better, more talented, management, and the resources to support them. Organisations reacted to these claims by seeking external sources to provide these talent management services. As part of this "buying" external services, a new occupation, executive coaches, emerged to assist organisations manage what was seen

as the “war for talent” and talent management. However, a further consequence of buying the services of executive coaches, was that the leaders of *professional associations* for executive coaching began to assert the importance, from an organisational perspective, of the work that executive coaches performed. This led the leaders of the professional associations to try to turn executive coaching into a profession – or to claim that status of a profession - a profession of executive coaches, with all the requirements or modes commonly understood to be feature of being a profession, including boundary setting and credentialing.

The focus of this thesis can be found in stages 3 and 4 from the Greenwood et al (2002) model. Greenwood et al (2002) state that the third stage in their framework is pre-institutionalisation. In this third stage, the professional associations are using innovation and technically viable solutions for change to the problems they believe organisations face. Professional associations are then putting forward their members, as having the answers to the perceived problems. Having established the viability of the proposed solution, the professional associations are moving towards establishing and justifying solutions, what Greenwood et al (2002) refer to as stage 4, theorization. It should be noted that the use of “theorization” should not be understood as a process of developing an academic theory, as Greenwood et al (2002) use the term differently. They state, quoting Tolbert and Zucker (1996, p. 183),

theorisation involves “two major tasks”: *specification* of a general “organizational failing” for which a local innovation is a “solution or treatment,” and *justification* of the innovation. (p.60 italics in original)

Diffusion of these ideas will only occur if the new ideas are considered more appropriate than existing practices, thus giving them “moral” legitimacy, and “pragmatic” legitimacy or functional superiority in the task (p.60).

Greenwood et al (2002) also discuss two further phases of their model, stages 5 and 6. Stage 5 is Diffusion, whereby increasing objectification and pragmatic legitimacy is achieved, and stage 6 is Reinstitutionalization, where cognitive legitimacy is achieved. In the event that diffusion is not achieved, then changes are likely to become a fleeting fad or fashion. Although the occupation I am examining has not succeeded in moving into phases 5 and 6 of the Greenwood et al (2002) model, there is little evidence that

executive coaching is merely a fad or fashion. Dagley (2006) indicates that HR professionals view coaching as an activity that they can offer as development of their executives. However, because stages 5 and 6 have not emerged for executive coaching, they will not be considered in this thesis.

It is acknowledged that the origins of traditional professions such as medicine, law and the clergy pre-date the industrial revolution, but most other occupations with some claim to being considered professions emerged from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. The combined influences of rising per capita incomes and population density, which occurred alongside industrialisation, resulted in the increasing division of labour as demand for specialised services grew. This changed environment enabled individuals to earn a living from selling specialised services as opposed to selling tangible goods or producing food (Haskell, 1984), and led to the concept of “an expert” as opposed to *being expert* as a way of earning a living. It is argued by some, that this division of labour and our reliance on experts is a distinctive feature of a modern society (Haskell, 1984; Giddens, 1990).

There is a large body of literature on established professions, with the largest body of work from sociology. These accounts have explored, from a historical perspective, the strategies used by established professions to professionalise (e.g. medical and legal), the changing nature of professions (e.g. medical, legal and accounting), and the decline or “deprofessionalization” of professions (e.g. legal and accounting) (see Freidson, 1970, 1986, 1994, 2001; Johnson, 1972, 1982; Toren, 1975; Larson, 1977; Macdonald, 1985; Halliday, 1987; Abbott, 1988; Roach, 1992; Lee, 1995; Greenwood and Lachman, 1996; Reed, 1996; Fournier, 1999; Crompton, 2002; Stern, 2006). There has also been some attention paid to less successful attempts by occupations at claiming professional status (e.g. nurses, midwives and social workers) (Crompton, 1987, 1989; Witz, 1992; Hallam, 2002).

There is a further literature on voluntary associations, and the actions that the leadership of these organisations undertake in managing the association. As the professional associations of executive coaching are operating on a voluntary basis, i.e. there is no

payment of any kind and no professional management, this literature will also be examined.

However, in comparison to research into established professions and occupations, there has been relatively little critical work carried out into the strategies used by contemporary emerging occupations wishing to professionalise. Saks (2010, p.905) argues that the “professions-centric” approach used by analysts in looking at professions has meant that more recent professionalising groups have been little researched. There have been only a few works or articles written about the purported professionalization projects of emerging occupations such as marketing, homoeopathy, therapeutic massage, management consulting or financial services (see Cant and Sharma, 1995; Clarke, 1999; Clark and Fincham, 2002; Oerton, 2004; Enright, 2006). This thesis, then, addresses this lack of critical work on emerging occupations by examining the strategies and tactics used in the professionalization actions of professional associations in a modern emerging occupation.

I begin this chapter with a brief overview that examines the study of professions. I use the framework established by Greenwood et al (2002) that, what they term “theorization”, is using the techniques to establish professionalism. These techniques are important to achieving change by using boundary setting, credentialing and the rhetoric surrounding these techniques via communication to others involved in establishing a profession. Sections 2 and 3 focus more on the professionalization process and so will examine aspects of social closure with regard to occupations. Section 2 will examine the use of boundary setting as part of a professional project. Section 3 will examine the use of credentialing as part of a professional project. Section 4 will examine how emerging occupations use “professionalism as a set of persuasive ideas or ideology” (Evetts, 2003, p.24), in particular their use of rhetoric and persuasion in establishing a professional identity. Section 5 will examine the role of the state and voluntary associations. This chapter argues that social closure and occupational “turf wars” are significant aspects of the process of seeking to establish a profession, and emphasises the role that can be played by professional associations in defining and enhancing an occupation’s place in the economy. It asks, as Watson (2002a) suggests, “what is going on” questions about occupations wishing to “professionalize”.

The Study of Professions

The study of professions began in the 20th century, with much of the early work (Flexner, 1915; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, (1933) 1964; Goode, 1957; Greenwood, 1957; Millerson, 1964; Etzioni, 1969) focusing on providing a definition of what constituted a profession. These researchers were interested in professions as a distinct area of work, although there was no agreement on what formally constituted a profession. As Millerson (1964) discovered when undertaking a comparison of definitions and characteristics of professions presented by 21 authors including Carr-Saunders and Wilson, Parsons, Flexner and Greenwood amongst others, there was no agreed definition or definitive characteristic. However, as Macdonald (1995) points out, these writers took a functionalist viewpoint of professions. Their belief was that the professions had become a bulwark of society, that their altruism and, quoting Parsons (1954), their “collectivity-orientation” provided the basis for the role of professions within society and provided a rationale for their high status. This is not to say that all writers coming from a functionalist perspective were without criticism of the professions. Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1964) were critical of the professions, particularly the failings of the professions to provide a service to all, rather than to those people who had the ability to pay the fees.

Wilensky (1964) was interested in *how* professions emerged, and whether there was a common path to professionalization. He examined the dates when associations, education and codes of ethics were first established, and found no consistency across the occupations. His argument is that very few occupations would achieve professional status if they relied on achieving a common path to professionalization.

While the idea of being able to categorically state whether a particular occupation was a profession or not was of considerable interest to these researchers, attempts to determine the definitional qualities of a profession reached something of a theoretical dead-end (Freidson, 1986; Johnson, 1972; Roth, 1974). Nevertheless, the prestige of being considered a profession had with it a desirable “calling card and a price tag”. This

attracted the attention of symbolic interactionist researchers, whose approach to understanding the professions required, as Hughes (1958, p.45) states, “what are the circumstances” questions.

... I passed from the false question “Is this an occupation or a profession?” to the more fundamental one, “What are the circumstances in which the people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession, and themselves into professional people?” and “What are the steps by which they attempt to bring about identification with their valued model?” (p.45)

As Macdonald (1995) has argued, many theorists misunderstood these questions by Hughes as a question of structure, without realising that the questions related to *action* by the occupations and so *what* were the circumstances under which they did this.

Symbolic interactionists such as Hughes (1958), Becker and Strauss (1956), Bucher and Stelling (1969), and Freidson (1970) moved away from the functionalist approach outlined above, believing that it was too close to what the professions themselves had put forward as a rationale for their prestige and rewards, and that they had adopted the professions’ self-reflective view. The symbolic interactionists thus viewed the status of “profession” as a social construct, open to contest by other occupational and social actors.

Two of the most influential writers on the professions in the last forty years have been Larson (1977) and Abbott (1988), both of whom examined how and in what way professions developed. Both of these writers are of particular interest in examining the professionalization attempts of executive coaches, Larson (1977) focusing on the “professional project” and Abbott (1988) on the “jurisdiction” of the professions.

Larson’s (1977) approach is based on the concept of a “professional project”. This approach involves an examination of both market control and collective mobility. She argues that these concepts are analytically distinct, but in practice are inseparable. As Larson (1977, p. xvi) states, her intention is:

... to examine here how the occupations that we call professions organized themselves to attain market power. I see professionalization as the process

by which producers of special services sought to constitute *and control* a market for their expertise. Because marketable expertise is a crucial element in the structure of modern inequality, professionalization appears *also* as a collective assertion of special social status and as a collective process of upward social mobility. (italics in original)

Larson (1977, p.xvii) goes on to say that “[p]rofessionalization is thus an attempt to translate one order of scarce resources – special knowledge and skills – into another – social and economic rewards”. Larson’s (1977) argument is that establishing market control of a set of activities by an occupation will not only give collective mobility to all members, but it will create social closure. Social closure of the occupation will occur if only those who have the relevant expertise and formal qualifications will be accepted. Fournier (2000) argues that the establishment of a profession is part of the process of social closure, described by Parkin (1979, p.44) as “...the process by which social collectives seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles”. Haug and Widdison (1975) argue that occupational prestige or status is seen through the eyes of the general public, and as Larson suggests, that it is because *others*, including the state, regard that occupation as a profession that social closure is obtained (Larson, 1977).

Abbott (1988) has also written about professions, though he adopts a systems approach, focusing on how independent professions develop relations of interdependence. As he states, “...professions constitute an interdependent system. A move by one inevitably affects others” (p.86). He examines how professions control their work, and how this control can potentially bring them into conflict with other professions or aspiring professions. He also examines how professions compete with one another to occupy what he refers to as “vacant space” (p.3). As such his proposal was that the key to understand professions was the process of establishing “jurisdiction” and the need to maintain boundaries, and these concepts are useful in examining how emerging professions seek to claim professional status.

Abbott (1988) argues that all occupations work within a system where each occupation battles with other occupations, with the aim to create an environment that will protect an

occupation from incursions from other potentially similar occupations. To do this they need to claim what Abbott (1988) calls “jurisdiction”, that is, the exclusive right to control an area of work. This right is based on expertise and knowledge. This may include subsuming another occupation or laying claim to an area of work that is new.

In claiming jurisdiction, a profession asks society to recognize its cognitive structure through exclusive rights. These claimed rights may include absolute monopoly of practice and of public payments, rights of self-discipline and of unconstrained employment, control of professional training, of recruitment, and of licensing, to mention only a few. (Abbott, 1988, p. 59)

As part of this process, Abbott (1988) recognises the importance of an occupation taking on the trappings of an established profession, such as an association, codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures. He views claims to the status of profession as not necessarily a collective mobility project, as put forward by Larson (1977), but more as a way of asserting and controlling an area of work.

It should be noted that much of the work that has been done on professionalisation has tended to be on what are considered established or traditional professions, such as doctors, lawyers and accountants. While these studies are of interest, they do not explain what is happening when a new occupation starts to emerge in recent historical times, as doctors, lawyers and accountants emerged in a different time period with different circumstances and under different conditions. For example doctors emerged in Britain via an Apothecaries Act of 1815 (Macdonald, 1995, p.77). As Macdonald (1995) argues, the emergence of the doctors through the next forty years of internal disputes was finalised by passing the Medical Act of 1848 (p.77). As Macdonald (1995) points out, while it was an Act of Parliament that promised legislation to control who could call themselves doctors, the state did not involve itself in the regulative mechanism governing the occupation. Regulative mechanisms were left to the profession itself to determine how it was to be governed. By allowing doctors to determine who and when breaches of medical practice occurred it created an activity that is governed by the profession, not by government. In this case the government was not interested in taking an active role. However, it is noteworthy that scholars of the

traditional professions, particularly medicine, note that in the late twentieth and earlier twenty-first century, the power and prestige of medicine has declined. Nevertheless, subsequent professions have seen this activity of determining who should be allowed to practice as the ‘gold standard’ and therefore seek to limit government involvement to a minimum. As to whether the conditions that gave rise to the traditional professions continue to be the same today and the role that these traditional occupations now have, will be examined in Chapter 7.

Occupations seeking to professionalise today will often experience quite different circumstances. For example, gaining acceptance as a profession by the government and society may be difficult. However, this thesis is examining the *emergence of new* professions and as Abbott (1988, p.144) has stated, “Our longstanding fascination with law and medicine has obscured the blunt fact that most professional work is new work”.

Establishing a new occupation

A new occupation aspiring to professional status will usually attempt to follow the path that has been created by previous successful professionalization projects, for example, by adopting specific education that is aimed at producing occupational members with certified knowledge, establishing codes of ethics or developing associations. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that this will have a normative and a mimetic component for the occupation. Normative, in that by acquiring all the elements that are considered to belong to a “true” profession, the occupation is able to establish legitimacy in the eyes of society. And mimetic, because as they deliberately follow and repeat the actions taken by established and successful professions in claiming professional status, it is hoped that the aim of these actions is recognised by others in the society, and so given a similar meaning – an accepted profession. This will mean that the professionalization project reflects both an actual *process* and an *ideology* of being a profession.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Abbott (1988), Greenwood et al (2002), Lammers and Barbour (2006), Meyerson (1994), Scott (2001) and Tolbert and Zucker (1996) all note that professions are a form of an institution. In Greenwood et al (2002) the model

examines the emergence of new players among professions. It is expected that issues such as legitimacy will emerge in any claim to professionalization. Legitimacy, or at least the claim to legitimacy, is part of professionalization. Suchman (1995) states that legitimacy can be seen as, “a *perception or assumption* in that it represents a reaction of observers to the organisation as they see it...is possessed objectively, yet create subjectively” (p.574 italics in original). Suchman is referring to organisations, though this could also apply to occupations, especially where an occupation is attempting to create an organisation or institution, by establishing a professional association. He states that legitimacy is “socially constructed” (p.574) as it is dependent on how a “collective audience” views an organisation, or in the case of coaches, an occupation (p.574).

Greenwood et al (2002), in Stage 4 of their framework, use “theorization” to refer to a technique or a process, where emerging occupations can create for themselves, in a way that hopefully is persuasive to others, a reason or *specification* as to why a particular problem emerges. An example would be, why managers are failing to meet the aims of an organisation. From this they can create the solution or *justification*, which can only be undertaken by the occupation in question, which enables the emerging occupation to create a boundary around the work they do. So by specifying and therefore justifying this work the occupation is able to claim jurisdiction over the work, in other words, restricting particular tasks to members of the occupation.

Greenwood et al (2002) argue that to achieve legitimacy for specific ways of dealing with the problems of social change by using theorization, entities such as professional associations are critical, especially where the authority of the association can be taken for granted. As they argue, a professional association is useful, “when ideas are couched in such a way that they are perceived to be consistent with prevailing values that they appear compelling and legitimate for adoption” (p. 75). What Greenwood et al (2002) are examining in this part of their framework is theorization, and whether language plays a role in gaining acceptance from clients and the wider public. By examining the history of the use of rhetoric by an *existing* occupation – accounting - albeit an occupation that is itself going through change, they ask if theorization is feasible in different contexts, for example other emerging occupations.

The next sections will look at the theorization of boundary setting, credentials and rhetoric and identity as a part of creating a profession.

Boundary Setting

Larson (1977) and Abbott (1988) refer to boundary setting in discussing the concepts of a professional project (Larson, 1977) and jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). Both of these - professional project and jurisdiction - are key to understanding how an occupation may establish itself, by creating a boundary or parameter around the work, and therefore creating social closure around the work they do. "Boundary-work" describes the discursive techniques used by an occupation to maintain a distinction around their work (Gieryn, 1983). Gieryn (1983), in his study of scientists, examines the distinction between "us" and "them", and the use of discourse to establish the space around rhetorical boundaries, in his case what is science and non-science. Therefore, boundary work enables a profession to make distinctions around what they do, and as such, it has the ability to exclude anyone who does not meet the required standards or credentials.

The professional association must create a reason for "why" what they offer is valuable, and "why" the clients should want to take this up, and as such it must create boundaries around what occupational members do. Boundaries are "markers of unique knowledge domains" (Oliver and Montgomery, 2005); thus, to become a "distinct occupation" in a new area requires an occupation to create a boundary around what it does (Macdonald, 1995). However, as Lamont and Molnar (2002, p. 177) indicate, the notion of a boundary was initially a "demarcation problem... between 'special' and ordinary occupations." They ask, can an occupation claim this distinction because their knowledge base is acquired by university training or credentialing, as opposed to an "ordinary" occupation, where the knowledge base is not acquired by university training or credentialing. Boundaries were used to keep people out of the profession as completion of the training or credentialing became mandatory, therefore drawing a line between insiders and outsiders. It should be noted that boundaries are not always directed at outsiders; there can be closure *within* an occupation (Weeden, 2002) and this can be seen in coaching, where the executive coaches make a distinction between the

quality of the work they do as opposed to, for example, life coaches. Therefore, executive coaches create a boundary of “quality” around their work through rhetoric.

Larson (1977) observes that the claim to “special” knowledge indicates a desire for exclusivity and control of an area of work. What the members of the occupation are wanting is social or occupational closure, protecting their area of perceived expertise. As Reed (1996, p. 575) explains:

[t]hey must be able to carve out and control – ideally monopolise – an area of scarce knowledge and skill that contributes to socio-technical problem solving in such a way that it cannot be easily stolen or imitated by other groups.

Fournier (2000) argues that boundaries or areas of expertise often create an “independent and self-contained field of knowledge”, and that the basis for *why* these particular boundaries exist is often ignored. As she argues:

...the professional project involves not only an occupational group appropriating a field as its exclusive area of jurisdiction and expertise, but also the making of this field into a legitimate area of knowledge of and intervention on the world. (p.69)

Fournier (2000) argues that professions appear not because of immutable knowledge that establishes permanent boundaries. Rather, boundaries appear and disappear as a “professional field is expandable and malleable” (p. 72), and professional boundaries may shift due to changes in knowledge or the problems for which a particular field of knowledge is required to solve. This is not to say, however, that all professions will have the capacity to shift.

Abbott (1988) considers that the greatest struggle for a new occupational group is against other occupational groups that claim jurisdiction for the same area. This competition, he argues, can encourage new occupations to promote unity in their training and work. This is important for occupations where the control of education is an important part of establishing their control over a range of tasks.

While both Larson (1977) and Abbott (1988) share a similar view of the role of boundaries, Larson sees boundaries as a way of keeping people out of a profession

whereas Abbott sees boundaries more as a way of creating distinctions between professions. However, while these authors take a different analytical approach, their view on boundaries is not dissimilar.

Credentials

Licensing an occupation is governed by the state, though not all occupations will be given a license (Kleiner, 2006), and those that are not will need to rely on the use of credentials to limit entry to the occupation. Credentials are an attempt to gain closure within an occupation and Weber (cited in Collins, 1979, p.vii) comments that:

The elaboration of the diplomas from universities, business and engineering colleges and the universal clamor for the creation of further educational certificates in all fields serve the formation of the *privileged stratum* in bureaus and in offices. Such certificates ... above all, claim to the *monopolization of socially and economically advantageous positions*. ...this is, of course, not a suddenly awakened “thirst for education”, but rather the desire to limit the supply of candidates for these positions and to monopolise them for the holders of educational patents. (italics mine)

Larson (1977) argues that a key component of the professional project is the role of education and certification, with the tactical use of educational certificates and credentials restricting access to the profession. Indeed Larson (1977), Freidson (1986) and Halliday (1987) all place great emphasis on the role of the university in establishing the skills and knowledge necessary to permit entry into a profession. Freidson (1986) believes that a university education may be the control that ensures that skills and knowledge and eventually qualifications are vetted. However, it is noted that all of Larson, Freidson and Halliday’s work was based around the traditional professions of medicine and law. Nevertheless, the belief that university learning was key to establishing a profession did not take into consideration the role of the professional associations in determining what was taught, and how these people would be included in a profession.

This is of particular importance for knowledge-based occupations. Brint (2001, p.103), for example, argues that:

...educational credentials are a more important factor in the demand for educated labour than the knowledge that these workers bring to the market.

These occupations provide services, and as such there are no physical goods to be examined. While it is possible for potential customers to check references for examples of previous work, ultimately they need to trust the practitioner. Therefore the use of an undergraduate or higher degree creates the impression of safety for the customer. It also follows Weber's argument (cited in Collins, 1979), that the purpose of credentials is a way of evaluating suitability from a client perspective and, also, a source of closure within the occupation.

However, Fournier (2000, p.82) raises the issue of the "DIY manuals" and their role in giving access to the public to what is often considered esoteric knowledge of the professional. She claims that by allowing the public access to the language of the professional, it will enable them to conceptualise their problem in professional terms, and so the public will look to the expert knowledge of the professional to solve it. Furthermore, the use of abstract or specialised language will create uncertainty within the public, making the problem seem more complex. This in turn will result in the public being more likely to rely on the role of the professional for solutions. Yet, Freidson (2001) is a bit more circumspect about their role, as he claims that the capacity of DIY manuals to open knowledge doors to anyone, is threatening the dominant social role of occupations, and demonstrates the complex and contestable notion of control over an area of work.

Rhetoric and Identity

Becker (1970) argues that a "profession" is an honorific symbol, and that the focus should be on the characteristics of that symbol; what is it that people have in mind when they say that an occupation is or is not a profession. Becker (1970) states, "...in applying it to a particular occupation people mean to say that the occupation is morally

praiseworthy...” (p.90). He claims the symbol of the ideal profession consists of a set of ideas that constitute a “real profession” from the viewpoint of both layperson and members of the occupation. These ideas are related to: the type of work that is done by a “real” profession; relations with members of other professions; the internal relations of its own members; relations with clients and members of the public; the character of the members’ motivation and the kind of recruitment and training necessary (Becker, 1970:93). The positive relationships implicit in these ideas are not necessarily true in an essentialist sense, but, both members of the profession and the general public believe that they must be made to hold true if the occupation is to be a real profession and its work conducted in a morally praiseworthy manner. Therefore, as Roth (1974) suggests, a professionalization project is not undertaken simply to appeal to the “ideal”, but is done because it give the occupation the legitimacy that being a professional can bring.

Alvesson and Willmott (2002), in their discussion of the role of management, examine how the workforce is encouraged to be a committed member of the team. They go on to quote Deetz (1995) who states, “...management is often managing the “insides” – the hopes, fears, and aspirations – of workers, rather than their behaviours directly”. This is analogous to the actions that professional associations undertake. While Alvesson and Willmott (2002) focus on managers within organisations, what they describe can be understood as the “identity work” that professional associations undertake, and how they *attempt* to control the outcome. Though as they point out, any failure to convince may result in such pronouncements being viewed cynically as “bullshit” (p. 622) by workers, or in the case of professional associations, by members.

Thus the use of rhetoric within occupations is not new, and all occupations use this resource, as shown in Fine’s (1996) study of work in restaurants kitchens. The rhetoric of positioning and persuasion, by occupations wishing to make their claim for differentiation, is achieved by establishing specific language, norms or guidelines. This technique of using language, norms or guidelines, is of particular interest where the market is considered “contestable”. In other words, where there are few, or no, requirements for the occupation to have credentials or licenses and so the barriers to entry are minimal (Fourcade, 2006, p.151). Fourcade (2006) argues that this is what differentiates doctors or lawyers from consultants, because you cannot be a doctor

without a board certification, or a lawyer without passing a bar exam, but you can be a consultant without training or licensing. Therefore, Fourcade (2006) argues, that having a “specific language is a fundamental element in the establishment of a coherent jurisdictional monopoly” (p. 159) for an occupation that does not have a license or educational credentials as a condition for practice, as it creates an impression that the occupation can claim specific knowledge. Alvesson and Johansson (2000) refer to this as “manipulation and seduction through language” (p. 10). However, both Larson (1977) and Abbott (1988) indicate that, while it is important to have the qualifications, it is through the use of abstract or esoteric knowledge that individuals can, and do, ensure their role as a member of the profession. Therefore, researching identity and the techniques used by those claiming professional status, allows us to understand how they seek to create an image corresponding with the role of a profession.

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) suggest, “...identity work refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness”. While Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) refer to individuals, leaders of work organisations and professional associations are also involved in attempting to influence the identities of their members. Forsyth and Danisiewicz (1985) state that for a profession to present itself as a profession, it needs to be considered essential (its importance to clients), exclusive (they have a monopoly on the service) and complex (requires their specific body of knowledge). Professions will use exclusive “talk” around what they consider to be essential, exclusive and complex.

Watson (2008) states that in establishing identity it is critical to distinguish “between people’s ‘internal’ self-identities and, the ‘external’ social-identities to which they relate” (p.123). This supports the position of Goffman (1990), who states that professions need to ask what image do they want the public to perceive. In establishing professional identity the question often asked is “who are we” but Ibarra (1999) states the question should be more about “who do we want to be” and equally, “who do we not want to be”. Thus identity can have a positive perception, “who we want to be” but there is also the negative, “who do we not want to be”. In executive coaching, this involves not wanting to be seen as consultants or life coaches. The construction of

positive and negative imagery requires a professional association to create identity concepts for members and for clients.

Fourcade (2006) suggests that creating the identity of “who are we” and “who do we want to be” is crucial when dealing with contestable occupations such as consulting. Therefore the next section will look at contestable occupations and what they do in creating an identity that could support claims to being a profession.

McKenna (2006, p. 200) in examining the work of consultants, states that because consultants have an uncertain role and do not have explicit professional credentials, they “employed the language and metaphors of professionalism to gain cultural authority”. The use of this rhetoric to persuade others of their legitimacy provides opportunities to target the, sometimes detrimental, images that may have been created by others about their occupation (Kitay and Wright, 2007). In discussing efforts to make consulting more acceptable, Alvesson and Robertson (2006) point to the use of cultural/symbolic actions as a method to justify their claim to “expertise”. Some of these, as they argue, are standard indicators of superiority or success – size, profit, growth etc., or that the office location was prestigious, but other indicators are subtler. These included, creating the impression that they would only employ the best candidates for jobs, thus giving the people who work there and the clients the belief that the members of the consultancy were the best in their field (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). In creating a “best” image, the occupation has to develop not only a range of beliefs of “who we are”, but also the occupation needs to create a “significant other” (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006) to validate their claims. The “significant other” may be a client or an industry leader who will vouch for their claims.

More generally, building an image of respectability has been a critical part of becoming a profession. Macdonald (1995) observes that appearing to be successful and prestigious, may improve the overall opinion that the community or organisations may have of an occupation. As Hall (1979, p. 125) states, “...professions seek to survive, and even prosper; they construct a reality about themselves which they hope will be accepted by their environment.”

By using the claims of respectability, a professional association will hope to persuade the general public and/or other organisations that expertise in an occupational area should be accepted (Fine, 1996). These groups are claiming that something is worth doing and “we” (Strauss, 1982) are doing it. Greenwood et al (2002) refer to this in the third stage of institutional change, pre-institutionalisation. Occupations create opportunities for themselves by undertaking an area of unclaimed expertise and making it theirs, proving that they are able to undertake the role, and that they have the necessary expertise. However, occupations make choices on the specific language, terminology and rhetoric that are used in this process, and these are based on how they want others to interpret what the occupation does and create identity.

Use of the “Guru”

Recognised professions have journals as part of their armoury. However, occupations that are attempting to professionalise, or are using the professional label, will often rely on the use of the “guru” to make their claim more substantial. Many management writers such as Clark and Salaman (1998) have dismissed the importance of gurus as part of the professionalization process of business service occupations, because they argue that gurus:

...involve the presentation of ambitious claims to transform managerial practice, organizational structures and cultures and, crucially, organizational performance, through the recommendation of a fundamental almost magical cure or transformation that rejects the past, and reinvents the organization, its employees, their relationships, attitudes and behaviour (p.138).

Despite these criticism, the use of gurus is still common in occupations such as management consulting. Indeed Clark and Salaman (1998) recognise the role that producing high profile publications plays in achieving the status of guru. As they state, Peters and Waterman’s, (1992) book *In Search of Excellence* sold more than 5 million copies worldwide, Stephen Covey’s book *Seven Habits* spent four years on the New York Times best seller list and sold more than 6 million copies, and Hammer and Champy’s (1993) *Re-engineering the Corporation* sold more than 2 million copies. Clark and Salaman (1998) also quote Lorenz (1993), who has said that Hammer and Champy’s book is considered the “management world’s most fashionable fad” (p.140).

This is supported by Kipping (2011), who notes that large management consultancies publish books as a way of creating an “issue” that needs to be addressed – preferably by hiring the consultancy! - and is a technique that has been adopted by smaller consultancies. However, Clark and Salaman (1998) go on to say the gurus are “successful orators, indeed experts in persuasive performances” (p.140).

Fincham and Clark (2002), in their study of management consultancies, claim that there are “new forms of “fashionable” management knowledge” (p.7). They argue that the real issue for consultancies that market new knowledge is to convince the client that the work they offer is something of value, that is, they are the “gurus” of this “new knowledge”. Alvesson (1993, 2001) argues that to achieve this, management consultants need to use rhetorical images and strategies to convince the client. The claim of knowledge, science, rationality and also the personal qualities and experiences of the consultants concerned, are commonly included within this approach. It can be argued that many smaller consultancies, particularly if their members have not achieved guru status, will provide advice based on the management fad of the day promulgated by high profile members of the occupation.

The claim to specialist knowledge and the role of gurus play an important role in gaining a client’s trust. Jackson (2002, p. 172) describes gurus as:

Management gurus can be distinguished from other actors within the management advice industry, such as the consultant and the academic, by their relative scarcity (there is only a handful of gurus at any one time); their considerably wider sphere of influence; their almost exclusive reliance on one-way, mass-mediated communication primarily through bestselling books; and, their superior remuneration.

Jackson (2002) goes on to say, by quoting Kennedy (1991), that the key qualities of “timing; originality, forcefulness, a gift of self-promotion and perhaps above all else, the ability to encapsulate memorably what other recognize as true” (p. 172). As Clark and Salaman (1998) state, “management gurus are more than successful authors - they are also successful orators, indeed experts in persuasive performances” (p.140).

Jackson (2002) also states that while gurus are part of the performance and impression management that consultants try to manage, gurus are distinct in that what they are

looking for are ways to both create and answer uncertainty among executives and managers. Some of this addresses managers who are looking for ways to survive or to demonstrate superiority; in either circumstance gurus can offer these opportunities, either survival or superior performance (Jackson, 2002). Clark and Salaman (1996) focus on individual groups such as the academic guru or the consultant guru. However, McKenna (2006) argues that as management consultancy organisations, such as McKinsey, have become larger they need to continuously demonstrate the need for “new” processes and knowledge. It would appear that both of these groups, the individual, such as the academic, and the large consulting firms, do demonstrate the use of the “guru”. Especially as large consulting firms, such as McKinsey, have presented themselves to organisations as the “gurus” and have positioned themselves to provide the services required.

The above section can be linked back to Greenwood et al’s (2002) stage four, theorization. An occupation needs to specify the “how” and “why” a client organisation might be failing, and at the same time provide justifications as to why their solution is the best available. These actions help occupations to create the required moral and pragmatic legitimacy. This is because the legitimacy can appeal to concerned managers, for example in the “war for talent” or re-engineering the corporation, as being the answer, and furthermore it is what other clients are being offered, and so it is “cutting edge” and worthwhile, to accept the services of the “guru”.

Use of language and dress

Macdonald (1995) observes that the “minutiae of personal conduct and appearance might seem unimportant but in fact they are crucial...[O]f such stuff is the garment of professionalism made” (p.207). Language plays a part, and Ibarra (1990) states that failure to convey images that are consistent with whom you want to be, can ultimately damage your ability to enact a role. Kipping (2011), in examining management consultants, found that the use of language was part of the technique utilised by consultants to construct an image of professionalism. Having created the image of professionalism, leaders of management consultancies used this image to make their consultants more confident, and therefore impress their clients.

Gardner (2011) examines the role of dress, and how the impression it makes on clients. She states that she is looking “at the tribal style and the visual cues in business” (p.32).

Discussing how a lawyer decides what she will wear,

My dress could be anything from barrister to bohemian. I could be ultra-conservative one day and wear a very tailored pinstripe suit with a crisp white blouse. The next day I could wear aubergine and chartreuse knits and magenta stockings, but I'm always guided by the context. When I address the board, I tend to gravitate towards the more conservative end. If I'm [working]... where the demographic is younger, I'll wear something more casual... [but] When you're a barrister, it's “What shade of grey [suit], what type of white collar will I wear today?”(Gardner, 2011, p.32)

As Roberts (2005) argues, the “poorly dressed are perceived as less competent” (p.687), and an inability to communicate in a manner that is considered appropriate are often reasons why people do not succeed.

Wellington and Bryson (2001) examined the use of image consultancies within an accountancy organisation. The image consultants' role was to prepare accountants so that they would appear as credible people to external organisations. They noted that the accountancy firms were looking for, “ways of increasing credibility and projecting the right image when undertaking client audits and when pitching for new business” (p. 940). They also identified that accountancy organisations used image consultancies for “dining etiquette and in the art of looking, acting and sounding like a partner of a major global accountancy company” (p.940).

Wellington and Bryson (2001) also state that although the advice given by the image consultants may appear to be unbiased, it often confirms societal and employer expectations of how, and what it takes, to appear professional. As they state,

The pressure to develop a particular image comes not just from the employer, but from the wider society and can be imposed on the individual by the individual themselves in an attempt to conform to a particular set of expectations concerning their position in society. (p. 942)

The role of dress and language within an organisation indicates the role or position an employee wants, or potentially wants to be seen as, and so their choice is “guided by the context”. Therefore as Macdonald (1995) argues, the use of language and dress, or more

importantly the failure to adopt what is considered appropriate by the occupation in terms of dress and language, will ultimately stop, or at least impede, the progress of the individual in their occupation.

Greenwood et al (2002) are interested in language and how the use of language can help or hinder a professional association. In their study they examined language, and how professional associations are using language, that is, how they are “wordsmithing” (p.66) documents, where sentences and phrases were deliberately composed. These documents were created for both members and the wider community. They discovered that the professional associations’ use of language was deliberate and measured, especially when they were attempting to get approval from both the members and the community for the proposed changes designed to enhance the standing of the occupation.

Greenwood et al (2002) do not mention the use of dress as part of their study, as they were examining the professional association role in accounting in Canada - where presumably people are well dressed! However, the use of dress is considered important in new or emerging occupations seeking professional status. As such, I shall be examining dress in later chapters, as a method for ensuring that the dress sense of the member of the occupation is considered acceptable in the terms of the professional association.

The role of the state

Macdonald (2006) argues that only the state can grant a monopoly over an area of work and therefore an occupation’s relation with the state is crucial. Indeed many authors (see Larson, 1977; Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001; Macdonald, 1995; Johnson, 1982; Halliday, 1987) accept that the role of the state is part of being a profession and do not question the state’s authority in this manner. As Johnson (1982) argues, the state is integral in obtaining professional status. It is important to note that research and debate on professions has emphasised the role of the state, both directly through legislation and indirectly through the state’s role in higher education (Lane, Potton and Littek, 2002).

For emerging professions this does not simply involve the state as the granter of a licence. The state may, through its legislative powers, actually *create occupations* and so create competition *between* existing groups, for example solicitors and conveyancing. It can also *create markets* for professional services.

This creates an ongoing tension between the state and the professions. The professions want to be granted licence that will give them a monopoly in their market. While monopolies do not sit comfortably within neo-liberal capitalist economies with governments that espouse free and open competition, there is a demand from the public to be able to judge the quality of the service that is being provided by the profession. This is particularly the case in medicine. Thus by providing licences, in theory the state provides a method for the public to judge the minimum quality of available services. As such, if governments are to grant licences, and so monopolies, to the professions, they are likely to want to maintain control of the professions. Professions, on the other hand, while generally welcoming monopoly, resist control by an external body. Indeed, the interviews I conducted with the leaders of professional associations indicated that some of these bodies, excluding psychologists, did not want legislation controlling their work, as they perceived that this would involve “red tape” and interference with their practice. Yet when I questioned further, their answers were not specific as to the level of state involvement that they felt was desirable.

Macdonald (1995, p.100) observes that the role of the state in achieving professionalization, “while latent for much of the time, is fundamental.” The reluctance of the coaching associations to seek licensing by the state will be examined in later chapters.

Emerging Occupations - Associations and Members

The focus of my research will be on professional associations and their leaders. As many of the professional associations that claim to support executive coaching are voluntary associations, I will examine the relevant literature regarding leaders, members and other stakeholders.

It has been shown that as part of a professionalization project, establishing a professional association is seen as necessary to establish legitimacy and present the claims of the occupation for professional status. The professional associations are the public faces and spokespeople of professions, and the potential power of the leaders of these associations should not be underestimated. It is through these professional associations that discussions with other actors - government, educators and clients – are undertaken.

Professional associations may present themselves as democratic and representative of their constituency by virtue of the fact that they have elections to positions on boards and committees. Those individuals who establish an association and occupy different official positions and serve on committees can wield enormous influence on the nature of the association. It is their choice of actions, which can design and determine the structure and purpose of the professional association. It is the leadership of the association that can craft and adopt a code of ethics, provide a credentialing path, or attempt to influence legislation. In other words it is the few who decide for the many (Michels, 1915).

Professional associations can also be the frontline troops in dealing or negotiating with other professions:

In considering the handling of relations with other professions, it is thus necessary to ask such questions as: Who in the profession is concerned with this problem and what difference does it make to them? Who does the negotiating and in what ways? (Bucher and Strauss, 1961, p. 334)

However, it should be noted that the association may not be representative of all members of the profession, and may not even be equally representative of its own membership. Indeed there may not be a “unity of interest” (Bucher and Strauss, 1961, p. 32) within the association. If this distance between the leadership and the membership becomes strained due to members perceiving that the leadership is not responding to their needs, a new association may develop to cater to these needs and represent their agenda. This can be seen in the many professional associations that claim to service the

one profession, for example, medicine or accountancy (Macdonald, 1995). Therefore any discussion about a profession needs to clarify which interest are being referred to, that is, the associations and their leaders that purport to represent the interests of the occupation, or all practitioners, who may or may not be association members. It would be a mistake to confuse the two (Macdonald, 1995).

In this sense the fragmentation of a profession through many associations may also weaken the power base of the professional association. They need to constantly provide a reason for people to be members of *this* association and not another. They need to demonstrate that they are not merely revenue-raising for the benefit of office holders, or providing a high profile for those office holders. They also need to show that they are serving the needs of their members and providing a useful service to these members. To do this the association needs to justify its position. If the association is unable to control entry to the occupation and the standard of work expected of practitioners, and thus ensure the quality of the professional to the market, this leaves both the association and the profession in a weak position (Birkett and Evans, 2005).

One issue that has been examined in the literature on voluntary organisations is the reasons for joining or leaving. Kitay (1978) quoting March and Simon (1958) states:

...that very few of the “satisfied” participants leave an organization, whereas some, but not typically all, of the “unsatisfied” participants leave (p.59).

Garceau (1966) in his examination of the American Medical Association found that members joined not because they had to, but because they found that being a member had advantages, such as an ability to get introductions to hospital staff appointments, reduced cost for journals and so on. However, he did find that there were doctors who did not join the AMA. Some of these related to race, and given the time and place that this was written, it is not surprising. Other reasons for not joining included apathy and disapproval of the policies put forward by the associations.

Kitay (1978) (citing Hirschman, 1970), states, that if the members of voluntary associations are unhappy with what is proposed by the associations they can either exit,

or exercise their “voice” showing that they are dissatisfied. While exiting is often a preferred option, the use of voice can be helpful, if by expressing dissatisfaction the member will be heard, or that membership is of value. These options are possible within the executive coaching associations, but my research has concluded that apathy is more likely to have sway and that dissatisfied members will allow their membership to lapse. Leaders of a professional association may find the work by Tsouderos (1966) more helpful in stemming the flow of members leaving. Tsouderos examines why associations lose members, drawing up 11 reasons as to why this might occur. Some of these reasons related to differences within the group where the relationship becomes strained, but others are of a more basic nature. As an association grows it will inevitably become more heterogenous, and sub-groups are likely to form. From this it is likely that there will be a level of discontent with the organisation as different and competing groups emerge.

Nevertheless, Maloney (2007) looks at the issue as to why *members* are part of the association. Part of his study examines the role of environmental groups and how many members they had. For example he examined the membership of Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and found that they had a ten-fold increase in membership over the last 30 years. As he argues this is not because of a growing interest in birds among the public, but because the membership was targeted and environmental leaders wanted to build member bases as part of their pursuit of public policy objectives (p.74). Maloney (2007, p.75) also quotes Bosso (2003)

The emergence of “virtual membership” via the Internet only reinforces the perspective that members *as such* are little more than organizational wallpaper, a collective backdrop for professional advocacy (italics in original)

Professional association, in this instance, are targeting members to be part of the association as these numbers are designed to impress clients and potential members. Members may have a disagreement with the professional association, some will leave and other won't, so apathy may be part of this. However, people are members to be *members*, in other word because they can stay in touch with the organisation, but this does not mean that they take an active part in the organisation.

The professional associations and their relationship with members are complex and not straightforward, and this is examined later in the thesis.

Conclusion

Abbott (1988) points out “Our longstanding fascination with law and medicine has obscured the blunt fact that most professional work is new work” (p.144). Yet the literature on professions is primarily about doctors, lawyers and accountants and their claims to being a profession. The literature also examines why nurses and teachers are not considered to be professions. What is missing from much of the literature is what happens when leaders or members of a new occupation decide that they wish to become a profession. The role of leadership is particularly worthy of close examination. The contribution I hope to make in this thesis is that I will be examining and addressing an issue that much of the literature overlooks, the emergence of a new occupation and its quest for professional status. I will be asking, as Watson (2002a) suggests, ‘what is going on’ questions about occupations wishing to ‘professionalise’. I will be using Greenwood et al (2002) to explore the what, and how, of the activities of leaders of associations as they seek to professionalise, and compare this process to occupations that have achieved professional status as commonly understood.

To do this I will be examining the emergence of executive coaching and how the leaders of the professional associations are seeking to attain professional status. This will be covered in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. In Chapter 4, I will be examining the boundaries that executive coaches put around their work, both externally with other occupations such as consultancy, and internally with other coaching activities, such as life coaching. Chapter 5 looks at the role that the qualifying or credentialing process plays within executive coaching, as this is a key area for professional associations to legitimise their role with coaching. Chapter 6 examines how the rhetoric of professionalization is played out in different contexts for both internal and external audiences.

The next chapter outlines the methodology and methods used in this thesis.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology and Methods

Introduction

My research examines an emerging occupation that is seeking professional status. In this chapter I will detail the methodology and methods that I have used in my research. As part of my research I examined the role of professions and how they fitted into society. In particular I was interested in the perspectives of Larson (1977) and Abbott (1988) on professionalization. Indeed it was Abbott who stated that, “the blunt fact that most professional work is new work” (1988, p.66). It was from this statement that I began to examine executive coaching as an emerging occupation, and the activities that they undertook to achieve professional status.

As previously stated I had a “pre-understanding” (Gummerson, 2000 p.60) of executive coaching and its role within organisations. I had been an external executive coach, and therefore understood the difficulties faced by executive coaches in gaining credibility, and presenting themselves to organisations for coaching roles. I also had an understanding of the role of professional associations and their emphasis on having coaching, including executive coaching, to be recognised as a profession. However it was my study of coaching as a student in the course, Master of Human Resource Management and Coaching at the University of Sydney, and their emphasis on coaching as a “profession”, that encouraged me to find answers to the questions I have asked.

Therefore the central questions of this thesis are:

- Why do some members of emerging knowledge intensive occupations, such as executive coaching, want to have the occupation recognised as a profession?

- Compared with traditional occupations that are commonly considered to be professions, what are the deliberate actions and strategies, both actual and rhetorical, that emerging occupations have used in their attempts to be considered professions, and what have they omitted and why?
- How can we explain the success or otherwise of emerging occupations in their quest for professional status?

Given these research questions, a quantitative methodology was not seen to be an appropriate method of analysis. A quantitative methodology can provide analysis of data from say questionnaires, but it does not allow me to uncover the meanings and perceptions of the respondents, which I believe are critical in answering the questions posed. As such I have adopted a qualitative approach based on a case study method in examining executive coaching in Australia.

Case Study Approach

A case study of the professionalization of executive coaching was selected as being the most appropriate method, as there is a need to understand a unique situation in great depth. The benefits of a case study are that a researcher can identify rich information; rich in the sense of the depth of learning that can be drawn from the unique situation under examination (Patton, 2002, Yin 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Yin (2003) and Patton (2002) all indicate that case study methodology involves a deep examination of a small sample of the various groups that constituted the occupation over time, using methods that might include interviews, observations and documentary analysis.

Yin (2003) notes that if research focuses on explanatory “how and why” questions that require a deep understanding of relatively few subjects, then case studies are likely to be the preferred research strategy. In this study, the objective is to explain the actions and forces that created a unique situation – specifically the events, beliefs, attitudes and policies that led to the executive coaching professional associations seeking to have the

occupation recognised as a profession. The research also examines the responses of other key stakeholders, particularly practicing executive coaches, educators and trainers, and clients. The interviewees were probed as to why and how questions, thus giving the interviews a richness that would not have been afforded if the interviews were not semi-structured. Much of the data reported here consists of interviews, but I also used what Silverman and Marvasti (2008) refer to as “naturally occurring data”. These can include journal articles, websites, announcements from professional associations and conferences, amongst others. These data has been used to add further insight on the interview responses, and provide an element of triangulation.

A challenge when undertaking qualitative case study research, especially as a member of the group being studied, is that you are both researcher and subject, which requires particular care to maintain a critical perspective to the research project. While the subjectivity of being an “insider” is a challenge, it must be met by using reflection and different methodologies such as interviews, conversations, observations and document analysis. This has led me to have greater insight into the data, and has allowed a more critical understanding of the themes arising from the research process (Patton 2002). Furthermore, as case studies have a historical aspect, it is possible to explore the strategies, changes and processes over time.

Methods of Research

The qualitative approach used in this research involved semi-structured interviews and the use of documents, websites, speeches, and practitioner articles and books. The interviews were semi-structured, as that allowed the interviewees to discuss what was important to them, but at the same time allowed me to control the direction of the interview. The data generated by the interviews, articles, discussions at conferences, and websites were examined using the qualitative research software NVivo (Bazeley, 2007). NVivo is a widely used qualitative analysis program that enabled me to code the data based on emerging themes and sub-themes, which could be refined and adjusted reflexively during the data analysis process (Bazeley, 2007). In addition to allowing me to refine the coding categories as they emerged from the data, the use of the notebook facility in NVivo enabled me to record my thoughts and ideas, and record the non-

verbal cues that emerged as part of the interview. Most importantly, it allowed me to question my role in the question process and to remain alert to any bias that I may inadvertently bring to the interviews.

As part of the University of Sydney ethics approval process, all reference to the individual names and companies or associations to which they belonged was kept confidential. Therefore references to particular research participants are listed according to the type of respondent, e.g. executive coach, or trainer. This was especially important given the frankness and openness of the interviewees and so ensured their anonymity and confidentiality.

I have used terms such as “executive coach” and “trainer/educator”, and these should be straightforward in their meaning. However, as noted in Chapter 1, the term “professional association” refers to the various coaching associations formed around the world. These associations have deliberately called themselves “professional associations” rather than occupation or community of practice associations. This has been part of the strategy adopted by the leaders of the association for the occupation to be seen as a profession. The term “clients” refers to the Human Resource Development personnel who are responsible for hiring the executive coaches. In general, these people were at the most senior organisational level within this group. It should be noted, however, that four of the nine client interviews were with clients who were General Managers within the organisations. All of these managers, Human Resource Development and General Managers, were responsible for choosing the executive coaches that the organisation used.

The aim of the research was to understand the debate within coaching, and in particular executive coaching, as the newly formed and labelled professional associations laid claim to being recognised as a profession. The academic literature reviewed in Chapter 2 explored current debates on professionalization projects, as well as the development of executive coaching and related occupations. Additionally, I was a member of the International Coaching Federation and attended conferences and was a member of the professionalization committee for the Global Coaching Conference. This allowed

critical insight through my own active participation, observation and conversations, as the coaching associations laid claim to being recognised as a profession.

Research Interviews

Initially a pilot study was undertaken which included interview with executive coaches, leaders of coaching associations and clients. By undertaking the pilot study I identified that I had not taken into account the role of educators and trainers. Yet, these groups are considered necessary in the professionalization process and were subsequently included in the final study. The interviews schedules are attached at Appendix 1. As well as the interviews schedules I have included the University protocols of participation invitation, information sheet and consent forms at Appendix 2.

The interviews involved a total of 64 participants and they were conducted and recorded as follows.

The largest group within this study is executive coaches; they represent 29 of the interviews, approximately half of the sample. To ensure that the sample includes different segments of the coaching industry, the sample, as far as possible, has included executive coaches with different qualifications (i.e. psychology or business), levels of experience, and operating at different levels within organisations. As much as possible, an equal number of males and females within these categories were included (see Table 1).

In seeking a group of executive coaches I have drawn upon executive coaches that I have known from my studies, Master of Human Resource Management and Coaching at the University of Sydney. However, I also wanted to include executive coaches who had not gone through the University of Sydney coaching program, as I was aware that simply interviewing one group of executive coaches could bias the results. I therefore made use of connections I had to other executive coaches, using a selective snowballing approach to increase the sample size while ensuring that various characteristics, e.g. gender and occupational background, were included. The executive coaches interviewed

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came from across Australia, and the people they coached were based in Australia, though a small percentage (approximately 10%), worked for organisations whose workforce may include an international workforce. The final group included 29 coaches of which ten were male and nineteen were female. Apart from four coaches who had only completed high school, all of the coaches had undertaken degrees, with three having PhD, nine had a Masters degree, two had post graduate degrees, ten had bachelor degrees and the last had a diploma. The first degrees were from many fields such as organisational psychology, journalism, veterinary science, occupational therapy, dentistry, pharmacy and business. Those that had Masters degrees, all bar one, had completed an MBA course or Human Resource Management and Coaching course, and so identified business as the primary focus of their degree and of their executive coaching, leaving only six participants who identified themselves as psychology based executive coaches. However, many of those that identified themselves as having a business background did use the term coaching psychology as part of how they sold themselves to clients. The use of coaching or coaching psychology is an issue that will be examined in later chapters.

The remaining half of the sample included nine clients of executive coaching services, thirteen members of coach training or educator organisations including universities, and thirteen leaders of coach member associations.

Executive coaches are usually reluctant to identify their clients for reasons of confidentiality, thus a sample of clients was generated through discussions with other executive coaches and colleagues. The clients interviewed included a cross section of industries, including banking, real estate, financial services, business and professional services and media. All of this group were Australian based.

The training/educator group were easier to identify and were taken from advertisements and my knowledge of the coaching industry. The majority of the group were Australian, but included international based organisations. The international interviews were conducted by telephone and were recorded as per those that I interviewed in person. However, as I was not able to see the person being interviewed, I made comments based on how they gave information and my own impressions of the interview.

The coach member associations were predominantly international. Leaders of Australian based organisations were interviewed in person, while those in international based associations were interviewed by telephone, with my own impressions of the interview noted immediately afterward.

There are individuals who will fit into several categories, for example some of the people interviewed fitted into all categories as an executive coach, a professional association member, a client and a trainer. In these circumstances their responses were categorised for analytical purposes on the basis of my understanding of their primary role, though some comments related to other activities and were analysed in those terms. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and lasted between 45minutes to two hours. The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible to ensure that when checking back on the transcripts, the recordings were accurate. Interestingly, often the interviewees continued to talk after the audio recorder was switched off and I was leaving the interview, and so were unrecorded. But as I considered these data to be part of the research process, I made notes as soon as possible.

Table 1: List of Interviewees – Executive Coaches

Level of Education	Psychology/Business Background	Level of Coaching	Specific Training in Coaching	Male or Female
PhD	Psychology	CEO/Executives	Yes	M
Bachelor	Business	CEO/Executives	Yes	F
Bachelor	Business	Executive	Yes	M
Bachelor	Business	CEO/Executives	No	F
High School	Business	Executive	No	M
High School	Business	Business	No	M
Bachelor	Psychology	Executive	Yes	M
Bachelor	Business	Executive/Lower	No	F
High School	Business	Executive/Lower	Yes	F
Masters	Business	Executive	Yes	F

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Bachelor	Business	Executive/Lower	Yes	F
Bachelor	Business	Executive	No	F
PhD	Psychology	CEO/Executive	No	M
Masters	Psychology	Career	Yes	F
Post Graduate	Psychology	CEO/Executive	Yes	F
PhD	Psychology	CEO/Executive	No	M
Masters	Business	Executive	Yes	M
Masters	Business	Executive	Yes	F
Masters	Business	Executive	No	F
Masters	Business	Executive	Yes	F
Masters	Business	Executive	Yes	F
Diploma	Business	Executive/Lower	Yes	M
Bachelor	Business	CEO/Executive	Yes	M
Post Graduate	Psychology	Executive/Lower	Yes	F
Masters	Psychology	Career/Executive	Yes	F
Bachelor	Business	Executive	Yes	F
High School	Business	Life	Yes	F
Bachelor	Business	Executive	No	F
Masters	Psychology	Career	No	F

Some interview questions related only to a particular category of respondent, but there were some common questions for all groups, which related to:

- how they defined coaching
- why did they think it had emerged
- what were the skills, competencies or experience needed to be a coach
- what coach member bodies were they aware of
- did they know about the discussions regarding making coaching a profession
- how did they define a profession
- what would be the circumstances necessary for coaching to become a profession
- what did they see as the future of coaching

These questions enabled me to establish if there was a common understanding between these groups as to the definition and necessary attributes of coaches, and their viewpoints on the professionalization of coaching as an occupation.

Furthermore, I encouraged the interviewees to explain their answers by asking open ended questions such as “what makes you say that”, “can you elaborate”, and “oh...really why was that”, which encouraged interviewees to further elaborate on their answers. These types of questions enabled me to probe the answers further and therefore, helped me to understand their answers, and what they meant in giving these answers to my questions.

Documents: Naturally Occurring Data

The interviews included Australian based coaches, clients and members of coach training institutes and Australian and internationally based professional associations. As well as the interviews there were other sources used, such as websites, articles in the press or journal articles. These are what Silverman and Marvasti (2008) refer to as “naturally occurring data”. The interviews may give us an indication of the importance of professionalization for particular individuals, but other sources, for example the use of publications, may give us other data from which we can draw conclusions, as these are intended for a wider audience.

As part of the research process I examined a range of documents including websites, research reports, conference reports and media releases, as well as standards developed by various coach member bodies and responses to these standard from training organisations and other professional associations.

The advantage I believe I had with this study was that I was able to explore the development of many of these documents in real time while interviewing and conversing with the actors leading the development of these documents. In the case of the Global Coaching Convention, I was a member of the professionalization team in presenting the background for the development of policies and procedures for coaching to be recognised as a profession. This represents a difference where historical documents are consulted. These documents provided evidence of the how the different

coach member associations were approaching their interpretation of a professionalization project.

Analysis of data

The aim of the case study is to enable the analysis of themes and data. Critical to this is the construct validity and reliability of the case study. This was achieved by following the guidance on principles of data collection as outlined by Yin (2003). These principles include the use of, multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence.

The transcribed interviews and data from websites and articles were reviewed and re-viewed during the process of analysis using NVivo, from which emerged themes and sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes were developed and adjusted as I continually read and re-read the data. See Appendix 3.

All occupations use a form of rhetoric to make their claim for differentiation, both internally and externally. This rhetoric is viewed by Watson (2002b) as:

...a connected set of concepts, expressions and statements which constitute a way of talking or writing about an aspect of the world, thus framing and influencing the way people understand and act with regard to that aspect of the world. (p.99)

Therefore, I became aware that the language that was being used was not neutral, rather it was used to persuade, or create an illusion of certainty. This is not to say that the interviewees who put forward these ideas were cynical, because their rhetoric showed how *they* understood their situation. As such, the semi-structured interviews were also analysed in terms of how the interviewees put forward their ideas, in the sense of persuading me, as interviewed, that what they had to say was vital to their understanding of how coaching should be viewed. In some instances, the respondents appeared to view the interview as an opportunity get their point of view across to a wider audience. Effectively, they seemed to view my role perceived as one that could be used as a “PR agent” (Alverson and Deetz, 2000) in terms of articulating their opinion.

It was interesting to note that in undertaking these interviews I faced a similar situation to the study of Cant and Sharma (1998) on complementary medicine. While I did not have the same difficulties as faced by those interviewees, i.e. interviewing “arch enemy” or “competitors”, I experienced pressure from the interviewees to find out what I did know. This in some ways did make me feel a little uncomfortable in gaining data. For example, I would be allowed to interview them because I was enrolled as a student in the School of Business at the University of Sydney, and therefore I was perceived as having no “agenda” within coaching. But I was asked questions such as “what did others say”, or “was that answer good enough”. Of course not all interviewees felt the need to discuss my intentions or respond in this way. Many interviewees had a very high opinion of the work they do, and of their own abilities, and were keen to discuss it. In doing this research I became aware of the need to be reflexive in approaching the “real world” observations I was making. Therefore, I became more critical or suspicious of my own beliefs and assumptions and using this, I worked toward a deeper and hopefully more dispassionate understanding the data provided.

In analysing the semi-structured interviews I also used documents and publications, designed to promote a particular coaching method or procedure. This provided a basis from which to work, in terms of understanding the language used by practitioners and others in the field. The way language is expressed is fundamental in understanding the processes and explanations of why things happen, when they happen, and when they are to persuade or, in some cases, resist.

Conclusion

This chapter has used the case study method to analysing the data obtained. I used a qualitative approach, as this was considered appropriate in understanding the meanings and perceptions of the respondents.

The research was conducted using a semi-structured approach and involved sixty-four respondents taken from the categories that make up the occupations. All of these interviews were recorded with permission from the respondents. These groups included

executive coaches, professional associations, educators and trainers, and clients. The largest of these groups was executive coaches who made up 29 of the interviews. I was aware that identifying these respondents could bias the results, especially if it only included executive coaches from the University of Sydney coaching program. I therefore made use of connections I had to other executive coaches, using a selective snowballing approach to increase the sample size while ensuring that various characteristics, e.g. gender and occupational background, were included.

The remaining half of the sample included nine clients of executive coaching services, thirteen members of coach training or educator organisations including universities, and thirteen leaders of coach member associations. The most difficult to identify were the clients, as executive coaches are unwilling to identify these, but discussions with other executive coaches allowed me access to clients and these came from a cross section of industries, such as banking, real estate, financial services, business and professional services and media. All of this group were Australian based. The training/educator group was easier to identify and was taken from advertisements and my knowledge of the coaching industry.

The coach member associations were predominantly international and so were interviewed via the telephone. Leaders of Australian based organisations were interviewed in person.

The questions that were asked enabled me to establish if there was a common understanding between these groups as to the definition and necessary attributes of coaches, and their viewpoints on the professionalization of coaching as an occupation.

I also used “naturally occurring data” (Silverman and Marvasti, 2008) these included websites, research reports, conference reports and media releases, as well as standards developed by various coach member bodies. These were important as the data was designed for a wider audience than just the members. Furthermore, I was able to use these in real time while interviewing and conversing with the groups involved.

Nevertheless, being part of the occupation myself, made me the aware of the potential for bias that I might have. I was also aware of the use of language that was not neutral, rather it was used to persuade, or create an illusion of certainty. Therefore, I became aware of the need to be reflexive in approaching the “real world” observations I was making, and I became more critical of my own beliefs and assumptions.

This analysis that I have undertaken has allowed me to answer the following questions posed in Chapter 1.

- Why do some members of emerging knowledge intensive occupations, such as executive coaching, want to have the occupation recognised as a profession?
- Compared with traditional occupations that are commonly considered to be professions, what are the deliberate actions and strategies, both actual and rhetorical, that emerging occupations have used in their attempts to be considered professions, and what have they omitted and why?
- How can we explain the success or otherwise of emerging occupations in their quest for professional status?

The analysis of the data combined with the literature reviewed has resulted in the following chapters. Chapter 4 – Boundary Setting, understanding the requirement to place a boundary around what is it is that executive coaches do and how this is different from not only others areas, such as consulting, but also how executive coaching defines itself from other types of coaches, such as life coaching. Chapter 5 - The Qualifying Process, how professional associations introduce credentialing as part of being considered an executive coach. Chapter 6 – Professional Identity – Persuasion and Rhetoric, which examines how professional associations make the claim that executive coaching is a profession.

Chapter 4

Boundary Setting

Introduction

This chapter will explore the question of how an occupation seeks to differentiate itself from others in such a way that it might be recognised as a “profession”. Greenwood et al (2002), in their framework of institutional change (see Figure 1), discuss Stage 3 – pre-institutionalisation, whereby an occupation can produce innovation and technical viability and Stage 4 - theorization, how an occupation can *specify* a problem that needs to be solved, while at the same time producing a *solution*. Thereby *only* the occupation can undertake to solve the problem, with their solution, and so claim jurisdiction over the particular area of work. However, in reality there is difficulty in distinguishing between the two stages, 3 and 4, and they can be looked at together, but for the moment both of these stages will be looked at separately. Both of these stages (3 and 4), are at work in coaching, especially executive coaching, when the occupation is attempting to distinguish itself from “other” occupations, such as consulting, but also from within but attempting to distinguish itself from “other” coaches, mainly life coaches.

Therefore to become a “distinct occupation” in a new area requires an occupation to create a boundary around what it does (Macdonald, 1995). The need to distinguish between what “they do” and what “others do” is considered vital to the occupation if it wants to be recognised as a profession. Therefore boundary setting is important to an occupation wishing to be *considered* a profession.

Abbott (1988) described the emergence of new work as a site for inter-occupational competition. He also discusses the need for intra-profession distinctions to clarify differentiation *within* an occupation. Abbott (1988) argues that these distinctions can be examined by looking at who is the end client, or the type of work performed. For example Abbott (1988) distinguishes between psychiatry, psychology and social workers, and claims it is the client, and their position within society, that will determine who will treat them. He states, “psychiatry treating the high end of the socioeconomic scale, psychologists the middle, and social workers such of the rest as get treated” (p.77). These distinctions can be translated into coaching, where executives, and this will include the CEO, will be “treated” by executive coaches, whereas the life coaches will take up the “rest”, say people looking to coaching for self-improvement. There will be a tension between psychologists and executive coaches as to who is best qualified to “treat” executives, but, both these groups will form an alliance to preclude life coaches from dealing with executives.

Boundary setting for an occupation involves two elements. First, it concerns the *external* distinction between two or more occupations. In this case it suggests the importance of distinctions between executive coaches and consultants, or executive coaches and mentors, or executive coaches and trainers, or executive coaches and counsellors or therapists. Second, it concerns the *internal* divide between different segments of the occupation, in this case executive coaches as distinct from other types of coaches, such as life coaches or business coaches.

As discussed in Chapter 1, it is difficult to distinguish clearly between coaching and other types of work, such as consulting. However, there is a substantial body of writing from within the coaching fraternity that coaching and executive coaching are distinct occupations. It should be noted that this is a claim by the *occupation*, to apply the category of *professional* to itself. But there would appear to be no supporting evidence from external parties, as to whether or not it is a profession (Thurk, 2004).

As indicated in Chapter 3, the research strategy used in this study involved extensive interviews with coaches and related coach industry leaders. The 29 coaches that I

interviewed were predominantly executive coaches, as that is the focus of this study. However, as part of the research process I interviewed other coaches, including life coaches, a career coach and a business coach. These people were included to gain a broader perspective of coaching and importantly, how coaches see themselves as being different from other occupations and from a narrower perspective, how executive coaches see themselves as different from other types of coaches. I also interviewed members of coaching professional associations, coach educators and trainers, and clients. Again the aim of these interviews was to provide a whole of coaching industry perspective of what these current active participants in the industry believed coaching was and how they believed executive coaching to be a different occupation from other types of coaching and other occupations. However, my ultimate focus is on executive coaching.

I deliberately excluded specific terms, such as tasks, roles, job or occupation from the interview schedule, so as not to lead the interviewee into specific language use. Interestingly, the interviewees used the terms tasks, roles, job and occupation interchangeably, that is there was no consistency of meaning applied to these terms across the spectrum of people interviewed.

The resultant ambiguity of meaning, especially when these terms are used in different contexts, is not surprising. However, while this lack of clarity may have little impact on the delivery of coaching services, it becomes relevant when considering whether, and how, executive coaching is perceived as being different from other occupations and other forms of coaching.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publishes the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO). ANZSCO lists recognised occupations, and in determining these, ANZSCO defines the interrelated concepts of job, occupation and skill as:

A “job” is defined as a set of tasks designed to be performed by one person for an employer (including self-employment) in return for payment or

profit. Individual persons are classified by occupation through their relationship to a past, present or future job.

Any particular job will typically involve an individual working for a particular employer and undertaking a particular set of tasks. People working for themselves are considered as having a job and belonging to the labour force....

An “occupation” is defined as a set of jobs that require the performance of similar or identical sets of tasks. As it is rare for two actual jobs to have identical sets of tasks, in practical terms, an “occupation” is a set of jobs whose main tasks are characterised by a high degree of similarity....

Skill specialisation is defined as a function of:

- field of knowledge required
- tools and equipment used
- materials worked on, and
- goods or services produced or provided.

Field of knowledge refers to the subject matter knowledge that is essential for satisfactory performance of the tasks of an occupation. (ABS, 2009)

Abbott (1991a) points out, being called an occupation, within a classification such as ANZSCO, does not necessarily mean that that occupation exists. However, Abbott (1991a) states, for an occupation to call itself a profession, there must be cohesion at the individual and structural level of the occupation. He notes that each is necessary, and neither is sufficient, to create occupational solidarity (p. 37).

Greenwood et al (2002), in their discussion of the stages of institutional change, list stage 3, pre-institutionalisation as a key component. Part of achieving pre-institutionalisation is to establish an “independent innovation” (p.60) solution to change. In this case executive coaching seeks to establish coaching as a key component of stage 4, theorization by justifying why coaching is critical to help organisations by providing

effective solutions. The following examines in detail the *external* boundary setting, where executive coaches are claiming there is a difference between the *tasks* they do and “other” occupations i.e. consultants do, and *internal* boundary setting, where executive coaches claim there is a difference in the *quality* of the performance, skills and attitudes between their work and other coaches i.e. life coaches.

The chapter is organised by examining, first, the external divide and will look at these from different perspectives, the executive coaches, the professional associations and the educators and trainers. This approach, examining different perspectives, will then apply to examining the internal divide.

Boundary Setting – The External Divide

Abbott’s (1988) notion of boundary setting involves the actions that representatives of an occupation take to ensure that other occupations cannot claim to undertake the same area of work. This requires representatives of the occupation to lay claim to what is “worth-claiming” (Strauss, 1982, p. 175) by distinguishing their occupation from others. While coaches and executive coaches are the occupation’s frontline workers, it is the professional associations that seek to represent the public face of the occupation. The professional associations have been, and continue to be, the most vocal on the point of differentiation. These associations will claim an, “independent and self-contained field of knowledge” (Fournier, 2000, p.78). This will allow the occupation, or the professional associations, to claim that only members of the occupation know how to understand this information. Furthermore, only members of the occupation can judge whether or not it is being carried out in accordance with the formal or informal rules of the occupation. This is despite the fact that the occupation does not require a licence to operate, as a psychologist does. However, in most cases occupations are granted professional status through a license that will come from the state. So despite the use of the term “profession” by professional associations, coaching does not appear to be following this path of gaining a license or registration. This area will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5 but it is important to note this point here.

Executive Coaches

Interviews with executive and other coaches provide insights and understanding of how they perceive the difference between coaches and other occupations. These interviews with executive coaches included the question, “Coaching is a service industry, which also includes consultants and other similar groups; so, what is it that you do that is different from them?” There was an emphatic response from executive coaches, that coaching is different from these other occupations. In making a case for boundary separation, the executive coaches generally claimed that their work is about “challenging and questioning” clients and to “move them forward”, rather than having “the answers”, or even advising, which they claim is the role of other occupations such as consultants or mentors, or in life coaching these would be counsellors or therapists. The executive coaches’ claim is that by challenging and questioning clients in a short time frame, coaches, and their work, cannot be mistaken for any other work.

In coaching this means distinguishing the work of the coach from other “advising” groups, such as consultants and mentors⁵, or “helping” groups such as counsellors and therapists. In these situations the following quote is indicative of the challenges confronting coaching, indeed almost all of the executive coaches interviewed expressed their frustration on this point. This executive coach was describing his experience in interviewing another potential executive coach for a client.

So I have just had an initial conversation with this individual and they had no definition of coaching. They didn’t differentiate between coaching, mentoring or management consulting. They... had never considered any tools, techniques or methods of coaching but called themselves an executive coach. (Executive coach)

⁵ While an older, but certainly more experienced employee can usually undertake the position of mentor within an organisation, it does have another meaning. Mentors today also operate externally to organisations, offering mentor related services. For example there are organisations that provide mentors externally for women in business. These mentors, working for the mentoring organisation, will come from other successful business. As such they provide a mentor service to women to help them achieve.

The above claim outlines the difficulty that coaching has in trying to distinguish itself from other occupational groups. By saying that the person had “no definition of coaching” and could not differentiate coaching from other techniques, this respondent identifies the challenge of boundary setting. The issue of tools, techniques and methods of coaching will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 5. As noted in Chapter 1, the definition around coaching is slippery and difficult to maintain, and I would argue that this is a critical problem for creating boundaries around what coaches do.

Responses from executive coaches frequently included phrases such as, “it is not consulting”, “coaching is very different and I would always differentiate with a client that I’m not a consultant”, or “I’m not there to counsel, I’m there to coach”.

The importance here is the continual use of the negative, what “I am not”, to stress the point of difference, rather than the claim to “what I do”. The use of such language by coaches suggests they are trying to create, in the mind of clients, that their role as coach is different from ‘others’ who may provide similar services to the client but these are not *coaching services*; they assert that coaching services are the exclusive domain of coaches who hold a special expertise in the conduct of coaching.

The interviewees consistently nominated consultants as the “other” occupation against which they were attempting to create this difference. Importantly though, they use the term consultant very generally to encompass all types of consulting.

This generalising claim that executive coaches are different from consultants fails to acknowledge the diverse nature of roles undertaken by consultants (Sturdy, 1997a). The core to executive coaches’ argument that they are different from consultants rests in their expertise in coaching tools and techniques, ownership of the problem and client tenure. The executive coaches believe that while there is an overlap in skills between consultants and executive coaches, there are significant differences between them. For example, executive coaches believe the most significant difference lies within the ideology of executive coaching. Executive coaching has an ideology of, “the answer resides within the client” which they perceive as being “sacred” and not something that consultants do. According to the coaches, consultants are perceived to have expert

knowledge of the processes and business, presenting their clients with a prescriptive set of recommendations or solutions (Clegg et al, 2005). In this case executive coaches are attempting to claim the “high ground” from consultants, by justifying their claim to the “solution” by listening to the client. It would appear that executive coaches are attempting to claim “theorization” (Greenwood et al, 2002), and this can be seen in the following quotes from executive coaches, though it should be noted that this was supported by all of the executive coaches.

One coach amplified this point in the following comments:

Well, I guess my definition of a consultant would be somebody who is an expert in a particular area they are consulting in, and they come and basically bring their expertise and sort of tell you what to do. Whereas to me, coaching is very different and I would always differentiate with a client that I’m not a consultant... I bring my area of expertise in helping people facilitate change and helping them learn how to develop themselves, so that in fact, hopefully I’m not needed forever and ever and ever, and that they can actually begin to learn those skills themselves... I bring it to facilitating them to work through, rather than a consultant who might come in and say, ‘well do this, do that, do the other’. (Executive coach)

Although executive coaches claim that consultants tell clients solutions purely as an external expert, change management consultants also claim to facilitate problem-solving workshops as part of a process of determining solutions and actions relying on clients’ knowledge. The distinction is thus an overgeneralisation based on a selective perception of consulting work

This raises the issue of being an “expert”. There would appear to be some agreement between consultants and executive coaches in being an expert, though in the interviews I conducted, this agreement was not publicly recognised by executive coaches.

Consultants put forward an argument, that the work they do is consulting, and this is their expertise (McKenna, 2006). Executive coaches that I interviewed, argued that the work they do is executive coaching, that is their expertise. Nevertheless, some executive coaches acknowledge, that having expertise in a particular industry, such as banking or

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aviation, can give them advantages in seeking work. This is expressed in the quote below:

I'm getting a fair bit of work with accountants. They say, 'oh (*Name*) understands me, he understands my pressures, (*Name*) understands where I'm at'. I don't really because I haven't had any real practice, but the qualifications have helped with a little bit of credibility. (Executive coach)

A further point of differentiation expressed by another executive coach, in this case regarding mentors, was:

Yeah well there is certainly a difference between mentoring and coaching. Of course mentoring is where the person is more experienced, or wiser, or has some greater knowledge than the mentoree, have been there before, and so has trodden that path before and can say 'here is what the assignment's like'. So typically in an organisation someone wants to know what is the political landscape like? Or the organisational or cultural landscape like. Someone in the organization can help them through that, whereas a coach, an external coach, doesn't need to know anything about the organisation or the political climate in order to help someone develop. (Executive coach)

Another point of difference is with counselling:

I mean, counselling, obviously, is quite different in that you might say 'well, how was your childhood, how was your mother'. It is backwards looking. Coaching is kind of here and now and going forward. (Executive coach)

Executive coaches distinguish themselves from counselling as they see themselves "moving the client forward" whereas counselling was about "where they were".

The above highlights coaches' claim that expert knowledge in coaching tools and techniques differentiates coaching from other similar occupations such as consulting, mentoring and counselling.

However, what was generally missing in the responses to my questions and subsequent discussions was *how* this claim to be different from consulting, mentoring or

counselling was justified. Executive coaches claim to be wise and expert in coaching process and skills, but how this was different to a consultant or mentor's wisdom and expertise was not clear. As highlighted later in this chapter, some clients require coaches to have experience or expertise within their industry or knowledge of organisational issues such as culture and politics.

Difference: Issues of Ownership and Time

The above quotes indicate the perceived *difference* comprehended by coaches between coaching and other occupations. While coaches appear to have strongly held beliefs that they are distinctly different to consultants, mentors and counsellors, it is not clear that such sharp differentiations can be maintained in practice. Two distinct issues to arise from the interviews were ownership and time.

Ownership

The point of ownership is perhaps one of the strongest points of difference. As one coach put it: "This is their (*the clients*) agenda and the coach has absolutely zero attachment to outcome". And another said, "the coach's agenda *is* the client". In other words unlike "other" occupations, in particular consultants, coaches say they have no interest in taking ownership of the final outcome of the coaching assignment, as this was the client's agenda. Therefore coaches believe that they keep themselves "clean" from ownership of the client's agenda.

However, the claim of ownership, of keeping the coach "clean", is in conflict with the literature being provided from coaching academics and practitioners on the Return On Investment (ROI) of coaching, claiming that coaching will show an increase in productivity (Armstrong et al, 2007; Phillips and Phillips, 2005; McGovern et al, 2001). Executive coaches, professional associations plus educators and trainers believe that by keeping records showing ROI increases, they can prove the efficacy to the clients that, "using executive coaches improves productivity". As such all of these groups are using ROI as a selling tool to promote the use of executive coaches within organisations.

Time

There are two elements of time that support the executive coach's claim for differentiation. The first of these is client tenure. Second, it is the time horizons of tools and techniques.

The point of client tenure is an interesting one. Executive coaches generally expressed the belief that there is no need to keep coaching the client indefinitely, whereas they believed that consultants remain with a client indefinitely. This is in conflict with clients' statements noted above that consultants are interested in moving on the next assignment, whereas executive coaches will be there to "help the client". However, executive coaches when questioned further, this point becomes slightly tenuous, as an individual will maintain a relationship with a coach, albeit for different assignments. This was confirmed when I interviewed organisational clients, who stated that the organisations retain executive coaches on contract for long periods to coach internal staff members.

From an executive coach's perspective, the second aspect, that is the time horizon of the coaching objectives and the tools and techniques used to achieve these objectives, presents a stronger argument for a point of difference. Executive coaches are emphatic that their assignments only focus on the "now" to the very near future, rarely more than three months ahead. Some executive coaches took pride in having a limited time frame for achieving results through their coaching sessions.

The other thing I say to them is 'we shouldn't wait for a few months to see whether it is working. After this first session you should have a sense of whether you are going to get benefit or not, or have got benefit' and after a second session I ask every client whether they want to continue. (Executive Coach)

Executive coaches believe this is in stark contrast to other occupations such as consultants⁶, who may take a project view over many years, and mentors and

⁶ While the interviewed coaches used the term 'consultant' generically, my understanding of how they used the term specially refers to those engaged in work pertaining to themes such as strategy,

counsellors who not only take a historical view, but also a longer term view. In the case of mentors, the role may last for decades.

This claim is supported by the coaching models, ranging from the more simple GROW⁷ model (Whitmore, 2002) to the slightly more sophisticated Solutions Focused Coaching model (Jackson and McKergow, 2002; Greene and Grant, 2003). All of these models have immediate, to very short-term future, time horizons. This is supported by homework, the tasks a coachee has to complete between coaching meetings.

Selling the Difference

While these claims of difference are important from the perspective of the coaches, it is crucial to understand how they sell these differences to clients. Without clients' acceptance of there being a difference, and a willingness to purchase this difference, we would not have witnessed the meteoric rise in the offering of executive coaching services. Nor would we have seen the claim of coaching, and in particular executive coaching, as an occupation. The following gives some insight into how one executive coach sells the point of difference to clients:

Most of them will start off by saying 'well I should be an expert who is going to tell them the answer to my business'.

'What if I tell you that I am not an expert in your business areas and it is totally quite ludicrous if I tell you, how to run an international bank or anything like that because I am not an international banker. So if the answers aren't going to come from me what is it we are going to doing together'.

So, then they say, 'maybe you could be a sounding board and I will give you some options of what I might do and you might give me your opinion of what the best option would be'.

'What if I am not going to offer my opinion? I am not sure what it is they are going to be paying me to do'. [laughing].

management, leadership and organisational development. Consultants are also differentiated from outsourced or contracted employees.

⁷ GROW (Goals, Reality, Obstacles / Options, Way Forward) model is one of the most common techniques used for problem solving or goal setting.

‘But what we might do is you might teach me some theories or....’.

‘What if I say I am not going to do that?’

‘Well what we might do is share your experiences from other clients that you have’

And I say, ‘well, I might from time to time but, what if I am genuinely not going to that’,

And they say, ‘I’m completely stumped’.

‘How are we going to figure out what it is that we are going to do?’

And then some of them start to say, ‘well, I suppose you might help me find it for myself’.

So, okay, now we are getting there. And then I will often say to them, ‘so what we just did in that 50 seconds, that is a bit like coaching. In that you knew the answer, you knew what coaching was, but you didn’t know that you knew what coaching was, so through a guided process of challenging questions with you and building tension because I could see’ (Executive coach)

In the above example the coach has clearly laid out for the client, in this case an individual, all the areas where the coach will *not* be guiding the client. For example, the coach is not a consultant – ‘I am not a banker’- nor is the coach a mentor – ‘I am not an options person’ - and nor are they a trainer – ‘I can’t teach you theories’. It is “asking challenging questions” that is what makes them distinctively *a coach*. What they can and cannot do marks in the mind of the coach, the distinction between coaching and other occupations. Many of the coaches interviewed used this process to show how, in their view, coaching made a difference to the client.

While some coaches were direct in their selling approach, others used a humorous and self-deprecating approach:

More often than not I say I work with senior executives in organisations and I work with them either as individuals or in groups all about how they can improve their individual performance, or how they can improve their collective performance, or how they can go about more effectively achieving their business goals and outcomes...I will talk about what it is

that *they* are focussing on, rather than what it is that I do. And then if the person is interested they will say, ‘oh, so, how do you do that?’ [laughing]. And I will say, ‘hey, I am working with an individual, often it is called executive coaching’, so if they are interested, I might go on and talk about something to do with diagnostics and things, or they may have walked off at the BBQ, [saying] ‘there is a banker over there I will go and talk to them’ [laughing]. So often I will describe it from that perspective rather than a label because they just misunderstand it. (Executive Coach)

The use of the term “banker”, in a community where banking is often seen as something unacceptable, indicates how the coaches perceive how coaching can be viewed. What is important is that many of the interviewed executive coaches did not use the term ‘coach’ when describing what they did, which makes it difficult to devise a boundary around their work. If they use other terms, such as advisor, then it is likely to be more difficult for executive coaches, professional associations and educators and trainers to create a boundary to keep other occupations outside the area of supposed expertise. Indeed, the executive coaches generally split into three groups when asked how they described themselves. Some had no difficulty in using the term executive coach; there were a few who reluctantly said, ‘Well, it’s what my business card says’; and the last group did not use the term executive coach, saying, ‘I don’t call myself a coach, I’m more a leadership advisor’ or ‘I finally gave up putting a title on myself’ and one said, ‘I rarely ever say I’m a coach. Well, I’ll say I coach people and someone once said to me you don’t look very athletic! So they still think of sport.’

The use or non-use of the term executive coach in respect of what they do raises some questions about the idea of coaching. When is coaching, coaching? More importantly how does this impact on the need to create an image of a coach if they wish to professionalize? Abbott (1991a) indicates that occupations will coalesce at both the micro and macro level. Micro, that it is the common *work tasks* that constitute the occupation. The macro relates to the formal structure that professional associations are able to put in place to connect the occupation’s members, for example the role of education, ethics or disciplinary action. What is occurring in this case relates specifically to the micro level, the common work tasks that constitute the occupation. If

the members of the executive coaching fraternity have difficulty in saying what it is specifically they do, and cannot erect boundaries around their work, then this does impact on their ability to set barriers to entry. It also raises the issue as to whether coaching can be considered generic, rather than the specific function that they claim.

It emerged that where individuals have operated or continue to operate in more than one occupational area, i.e. executive coach, consultant, mentor or therapist, they expressed the need to get “permission” from the client before they transgressed into the other occupation’s territory.

And I did less of the questioning and I asked and I said “would you like me to take off with some ideas here based on my experience at (*previous employer*)” and so I do ask. Any time a topic comes up where I might have some additional knowledge which might help them because it will open their eyes and get them to see another perspective I will ask and say “look I know a bit about this would you be interested?” and then I sometimes say “and now I am not coaching now, now I am going to be giving you some information would this be helpful to you?” so I am an information provider.
(Executive Coach)

This explicit seeking of permission to move across occupational boundaries was commonly noted in the interviews. Significantly, those executive coaches actively supporting the idea of coaching being a profession were most active in seeking this permission. That is, they considered it important to identify different roles or alert clients to this. But those executive coaches not actively engaged in this professionalization process acknowledged that they operated across multiple domains, but did not explicitly identify this to clients, seeking permission was not of importance to them.

Where executive coaches did make a distinction was in the process of bidding for work. Executive coaches commented that they used different types of proposals with different cost structures to represent the different types of work they might undertake. Typically, executive coaching was charged at an hourly rate and consulting either as a day rate or project fee. This was the major method used for seeking “permission” to act differently.

Clients were generally not so specific in the work they asked executive coaches to do for them. Some of the clients indicated that if they engaged an executive coach, they did not request them to perform other types of work, but others clients did, as indicated below:

[Name] would call herself an organisational psychologist and [Name] would call himself a, I don't know what he calls himself on the card, he's the managing director of his company, but he does everything from a lot of training, a lot of cultural audit... If I'm introducing him to somebody in the firm, I would introduce him as an executive coach if that's the work he was going to do. But if he was coming in to facilitate a half-day offsite for a group, I would be introducing him in that way, as a facilitator. So it depends what work he would be doing. (Client)

This does raise the question as to whether an executive coach is *always* a coach. As one executive coach notes, "well I tend to use the word consultant rather than coach, in some businesses if that is what they are happy with". If creating an image that "executive coaching is different from other occupations", then creating an image of professionalization would be helpful. But, what is interesting is many of the executive coaches interviewed were interested in becoming a "profession", but they were not *that* interested to make professionalization a priority. The implications for the professionalization of executive coaching will be discussed further in Chapter 7, but suffice to say that these difference in how executive coaches sell themselves creates problems if boundary setting is an objective.

Code of Ethics

One specific area of difference between coaches and other similar occupations, which was clearly accepted by the clients interviewed in the study, is client privacy. All coaches noted that client privacy is critical. Clients have accepted the argument by

executive coaches, that unlike “other groups”, in particular consultants⁸, they, as coaches, would only discuss the *context* of the coaching assignment with management, but not the individual content. This was because executive coaches claimed to abide by a code of ethics requiring individual confidentiality, espoused by a coaching association, even when that coach was not a member of that association. For example, most of the executive coaches identified that they are working under the ICF code of ethics and felt that this enhanced their credibility in the eyes of the clients, though many of the coaches were not members of the ICF. Executive coaches who are also psychologists identified that they were bound by their distinct code of ethics. Of course this does raise the question as to why these executive coaches would use the ICF code of ethics without being members. The reason most of the executive coaches gave was they acknowledge that the ICF has a good code of conduct, and they were willing to follow that. However, they did not feel comfortable being a member of a professional association if they did not believe that their particular brand of coaching, executive coaching, was not specifically recognised or acknowledged by the association, for example as a distinct branch. This included groups such as the ICF. This will be discussed further in the section on intra-occupational disputes.

Executive coaches used the code of ethics as part of their claim that they should not disclose details of their coaching assignments with individuals to their corporate clients.

...but I came across an organisation recently who was using a 360 - degree diagnostic tool to support coaching. We did a pilot with this significant organisation and at the end of the pilot the head of the organisation said, “well look, of course I get to have access to all the information don’t I?” And of course the answer was, “well, no, not only do you not get access to individual 360 degree reports, but whatever is discussed in the coaching conversations is confidential”. And he said, “well what’s the point in that then”, “I am investing in all of this so that I can find out that information.” That’s why he wanted to do this. So we didn’t work with that organisation.
(Executive coach)

⁸ Consultants are not bound by a code of ethics that restricts in telling the organisation what it is that they had found, indeed for many consulting engagements it is not only encouraged, but mandatory. Consultants also openly promote their work and achievements as part of their sales process.

The client respondents recognised and supported this “refusal” as a “requirement” when hiring coaches. Clients acknowledge the code of coaching practice, by recognising the right to confidentiality of the person being coached.

If we’re going to pay this amount of money and it’s one of those few incentives that can’t be monitored as tightly as say training. The perception that HR/ L&D can go and sit in the room or the business can go and sit in the room where and it’s easy to say ‘I don’t like you doing that, can you change it’, is wrong. Whereas the confidentiality and the one-on-one nature of coaching is much more difficult from a business perspective to monitor and regulate. So then there was a sense of, ‘well we need to be more thorough in providing guidelines and at least giving people some suggestions as to what they should or shouldn’t be looking for’. (Client)

This raising of awareness at the client level has reinforced that there is a distinction between executive coaches and other occupations, in particular consultants, with regard to confidentiality and access to information. Experienced clients have responded to this by setting criteria to select and evaluate coaches.

Summary

This section outlined the claims by executive coaches that they are different to other similar occupations, however in many respects these can be seen to be vague or overgeneralisations. While the points of difference are apparent in the minds of the executive coaches when they are asked, they are more difficult to sustain in terms of occupational practices. The claims generally centre on coaching expertise, ownership of the problem, client tenure and the timeframe of coaching engagements. They are more commonly expressed in the negative rather than the positive. That is, “this is what I do not do”, rather than this is “what I do” or “what coaches do”.

The executive coaches’ rhetoric that they are different has been passed onto their clients, through the coaches’ sales and marketing process. Executive coaches’ claim to having a positive return on investment for their services rests with the individual and their team or department achieving performance targets. What is critical is the extent to

which clients accept that in some respects executive coaches do offer a different service from other occupations. Specifically, clients appear to accept that executive coaches are not required to reveal the *content* detail of their coaching assignments to their organisational client, such as the human resource manager or business unit manager, but only that the individual is undertaking coaching. Because of this, it can be difficult to hold executive coaches directly accountable for the outcomes of their assignments. So while clients are responding to the executive coaches' claims for privacy, they do expect that the executive coaches will honour the trust put in them. This means that executive coaches, whether they are members or not of professional associations, are reliant on the coach associations' published codes of ethics to demonstrate this trust.

Professional Associations

The term professional association is used here to refer to the various coaching associations formed around the world since the early 1990s. These associations have, as part of the professionalization strategy, deliberately called themselves “professional associations” rather than occupation or community of practice associations. The professional associations have been and continue to be the most vocal on the point of differentiation. They have positioned themselves as the public face of what they are claiming to be the occupation and profession of coaching.

As noted in Chapter 1, within coaching there are three categories of professional associations. First are those who cater more broadly to coaches, trainers, educators and clients, such as the ICF/ICFA. Second are the professional associations who cater specifically to executive coaching, such as the ICCO. Third are the psychology-based associations, such as the APS, who specifically cater to psychologists. So in an association such as the ICF or ICCO, there are members who are registered psychologists. Membership of the APS is strictly limited to psychologists. However, in meeting the criterion of maintaining confidentiality these groups will be referred to as either Professional Associations – General, meaning organisations such as the ICF, or as Professional Associations – Specialist, meaning organisations such as ICCO and the APS.

An important fact is that the key representatives of professional associations, which are their board and executive committee members, are all practicing coaches and are all volunteers. The strategic focus of these members was to ensure that there is a difference between coaches and other occupations, and in the case of specialist professional associations that there is a difference between their practice and coaching in general. It is noted that some of the professional associations have grown to a point where they have paid management and administrative staff to manage marketing, membership, enquiries, and finance, but these people are not the key board, or committee members. Therefore it is not surprising to find professional associations promoting the difference of coaching from *other* occupations.

Professional associations, in particular, appear to be pushing the idea of coaching creating a space for “self discovery, inquiry and dialogue... to create insight” with the idea of producing results. More importantly, professional associations reinforce the coaches’ agenda, saying, “the coach’s agenda is the client”. As one senior leader from a professional association commented about coaching as an experience:

I say to people, you can’t, you try explaining to someone what it feels like to ride a bike you just, you can’t, the only way you can explain it is to have someone get on the bike and ride it. You can’t explain coaching; it is actually an experiential process. (Professional Association - Generalist)

The professional associations have actively pursued activities to educate clients and the public, using popular media and widely cited academic journals such as the Harvard Business Review to disseminate the general distinctions about what coaching is in comparison to other occupations (see Coutu & Kauffman, 2009). A leader from one of the professional associations believes that these activities have been a “catalyst for transformative change”.

I think that that is an important piece of becoming a profession, because once we can really define it as such, not just rent a friend, as some people have referred to it in the past because they don’t understand that it is an actual skill set, that it isn’t just somebody who is willing to listen to you complain about something. (Professional Association - Specialist)

While professional associations compete against each other for members, all associations were consistent in their message for the need to train the buyer, whether it be an individual, or organisation. They all saw the *buyer* as key to getting coaching accepted as being different from other occupations. In the case of organisations, the buyer would generally be the Human Resource function. The inclusion of clients as speakers, guests and attendees at professional association organised conferences reinforces this point. This will be examined in more detail Chapter 6, but it is noted here as crucial to gaining client acceptance that coaching is different.

Significantly, the coaching professional associations are not pursuing a license from the state. The coaching professional associations, in this case generalist and some of the specialist associations, excluding coaching psychologists, believe that coaching should be a self-monitoring occupation. The coaching psychologists' association insisted that they *did* want executive coaching to be registered, preferably licensed, as this was the preference of the individuals interviewed from the coaching psychologists' association. However, the psychologists interviewed did acknowledge that having executive coaching licensed would be difficult to govern, as executive coaches would simply call themselves "advisors" or "mentors" and thus avoid the restrictions that licensing would give. The following two quotes indicate the different beliefs:

I certainly believe that there is a lot of value in being a self-regulating profession as opposed to leaving it to each individual government entity to define it and regulate. But I believe that there is a tremendous value in being a member of your professional association and subscribing to, a set of standards of practice, regardless of whether there is government regulation or not. (Professional Association – Generalist)

Yes, in the sense that, when you are starting to deal with, deal in peoples lives then, in significant areas of people's lives, coaches are involved in decisions with influential people, very influential people, and those decisions can have impacts on thousands of people, governments, environments. And so therefore it is not a trivial exercise... Should the government get involved, I think that there should be some basic standards

and the industry itself is a major player, then the government should step in and, to ensure the safety of people. (Professional Association – Specialist)

The following quote is lengthy, but it does highlight the key distinctions of coaching as perceived by professional associations.

...in terms of consultancy I would say is, you employ a consultant and you get an expert to come in and have a look at the process in a business sense, because your business or the situation that is going on and give you a base to tell you what it is that you should be doing to actually move things forward. So you see, it is very much a, somebody else teaching stuff to you and giving you the benefit of their expertise on a, more of a telling relationship that you agree to pay money for them to tell you what to do.

...I would say mentoring is somebody who has been there and done it and is now in it to give the benefit of their experience to somebody else, again in an organisation terms somebody who has really been working with the mentee, so it could be the manager or it is somebody who has been in a similar position and as such could relate, situations they have had that relate to their experience. So again, still in that respect, the experience of the mentor and the mentee in kind of looking for a bit of advice and they are in the same situation.

Counselling, in my words I see it, it tends to be more, shall we say, problem based, it tends to be an issue of something that is not quite right to be fixed. It can require a bit of a look back in history, somebody to work through some stuff in the past whereas coaching, to my mind, is about the present and the future.

...and coaching has a larger proportion of inputting and self discovery and customisation to it... it uses self discovery, inquiry and dialogue to create insight and to help produce results. And, that produces agreed upon results. Then the other piece is that the objective and agenda is agreed upon and

belongs to the organisation and to the coachee and *not* the coach
(Professional Association - Specialist)

This quote also reflects the comments made by individual coaches. Reinforcing the above quote, representatives of professional associations perceive these distinctions between coaching and “other” occupations. They do this through the lens of how coaches deal with both individuals and organisations.

They argue that coaches are there to “create results”, to “make things happen”, something they say other occupations, i.e. consultants, do not do⁹. Though most professional associations recognise “coaching” as being what coaches do, they acknowledge that coaches do take on other roles, such as consulting or mentoring. In this case, professional associations recommend that coaches need to make it clear with the client that they are acting in a different capacity. As noted above, some coaches clearly make this distinction and ask for permission, whereas others do not explicitly make this distinction. This again raises the question of whether a coach is always a coach, and if not, what are they. This would appear to make a claim to professionalization more difficult to sustain, as the literature on the professions suggests that the occupation becomes the primary work for a given individual. This would preclude coaches offering services such as consulting or training. So for professional associations, the ease with which individual coaches can undertake tasks in what they claim are different occupations poses a problem. Indeed, it certainly creates problems in relation to stage 4 - theorisation (Greenwood et al, 2002), where they need to specify and justify why the work of executive coaches is different from “others”.

To reinforce this claim of difference and legitimise coaching, the coaching professional associations commissioned high profile firms such as PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to conduct research with the aim of demonstrating the positive benefit of coaching to individuals, organisations and the wider community.

⁹ The professional association representatives, like the coaches interviewed, appear to have either overlooked or ignored the fact that consultants do offer a broad range of activities, from strategy through to implementation and change management. Consultants also argue they are an “expert person” (Clark, 1993) within their distinct discipline. This will be discussed in Chapter 7.

In order for coaching to have the global impact and to actually be a tool that can resonate with people and not be confused with other professions or things like that. You need to clearly educate the market basically all over the world on what *coaching* is and that someone who's had training and education around coaching. It is a positive thing, I mean there are people that can say that they've been coaching all their life and they have, in some capacity, but they haven't known why things are working and they haven't done the specifics between consulting and coaching and therapy and counselling, all the places where they can cross the line back and forth in the telling of things. It's our job to educate the public and the best way to do that is the standards that are required for coaching as a profession, to be very, very clear. (Professional Association - Generalist)

[T]here are some people who clearly are not coaching ... they are more aligned to training or consulting, ... so what can we do for the consumer, how can we help the consumer not be confused in the marketplace when they are looking for a coach and they know what they are looking for in coaching, they are not looking for consulting and they are not looking for training. (Professional Association - Generalist)

Clearly only the professional associations have the financial capacity to commission major research projects to justify the position of coaching as a separate occupation and profession. This research also reinforces the brand of the ICF as the professional association of choice as well as supporting their rhetoric that coaching is a profession, a point to be discussed in Chapter 6.

A major activity that promotes differentiation is accreditation of training and education programs and the subsequent credentialing of coaches. Credentialing will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

We have a rigorous accreditation process for programs. It takes many months to get through it. It doesn't have to be university accredited or anything. Most people go through those programs and we have programs that are out there that don't go through us, we can't regulate them at all but

we've seen a lot of status given to the programs that have received our accreditation (Professional Association - Generalist)

... is not in the business of educating coaches on coaching skills. So we do not run coach training programs. ... So the credentialing process is open to any coach that finds value in demonstrating their integrity and their commitment to excellence for their client. As far as the coach training programs the (professional association) also accredits coach training programs and there is an extensive review process and very rigorous requirements that coach training programs have to meet in order to be awarded the accredited coach training program designation by the (professional association). Individuals that have done their coach training and successfully completed and graduated from an accredited coach training program can have great confidence that their training and their testing has met the (professional association) core coaching competency requirements. (Professional Association - Generalist)

An important argument for claiming a difference from other occupations is the professional associations' need to attract training organisations to accredit their courses. This claim is targeted at both coaches and clients, with the objective of demonstrating that their accredited members, coaches, are well trained and qualified. This claim is extended to suggest that accredited coaches have improved chances of employment. However, this was not always the experience for educators or trainers:

...virtually every interaction I've ever had with the (*professional association*), as a body, has been disappointing. When I saw, when I did start to put the wheels in motion to get the program accredited by the (*professional association*), I realised that the people that would be evaluating the program ... knew less about the subject than I did but were not aware that they did. It kind of undermined my confidence in the process. (Educator)

This highlights a discrepancy between educators and professional associations as to the standards that might apply to the core knowledge of coaching. This will be explored in

more detail in Chapter 5, but it is important to note here the difference between practitioners and some educators in the approach they are using to claim they are a distinct occupation and a profession. This difference is about standards, with educators seeking a more rigorous approach to skill formation than the associations.

While professional associations did not specifically discuss the use of media in the interviews, they alluded to using it. Key representatives of professional associations actively seek out and use the general media through interviews and press releases as part of their push to make sure that the media, and clients, were “educated” in coaching.

Summary

Professional associations through their branding and media activities demonstrate their belief that they are different from other occupations. Their approach, besides adopting the language of being a profession, seeks to educate existing and potential clients, gather members and promote why they are different. This is clearly driven by the appointed leaders of the professional associations, however, it is important to note that these were self-appointed positions when these professional associations first emerged. Therefore, it is from the actions of practitioners, who have actively moved to have coaching seen as a new occupation and profession.

Educators and Trainers

Coach educators and trainers also supported the argument, put forward by coaches and professional associations, that coaches perform a different function from similar occupations. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the educators and the trainers are split into two distinct groups. Educators, refers to teachers in nationally recognised university based courses where a formal degree is conferred and this degree is internationally recognised. Trainers, on the other hand, refers more broadly to commercial programs conducted by private, for profit organisations that issue a certificate, that may or may not be recognised by other institutions.

Coach trainers and educators also seek to ensure that clients are educated as to the difference between coaches, including executive coaches, and other occupations. This difference is based on the appropriate qualifications and experience to act as a coach. This may be seen as a cynical way to ensure that only qualified coaches “got the job”, however, interviews with many executive coaches indicated that they believed that it was in their interests to ensure that those promoting themselves as coaches and executive coaches were appropriately qualified, as they did not want to lose the status they had developed with clients. Some executive coaches, especially those trained by certain training organisations, were very candid about judging the standards of other executive coaches to ensure the client knew there was a standard.

...ask everybody how they became an executive coach. Where they learnt to be a coach. And if they haven't done something to learn how to be a coach, then they are probably not a coach even though they call themselves a coach (Executive Coach)

I had a great relationship with (*the client*), they will often get cold calls from people wanting to do coaching for that particular client and what they will say to them is ‘we won't consider you as a coach in our organisation until (*executive coach who had undertaken training by a particular training organisation*) says you are okay.’ (Executive Coach)

There is a commercial incentive for coach educators and trainers to establish a difference, and interviews with this group confirmed this.

Well I think you'd have to be able to distinguish yourself from being a mentor. In that, a mentor is a person that has knowledge in a particular field and is there to give advice, and a coach's role is there to *ask* not *tell*. A coach is an expert in process, a coach is not an expert in content. (Trainer)

Importantly, executive coaches believe that formal qualifications gained from recognised organisations do make a difference in their marketability. Also clients indicated that they would use executive coaches with qualifications from recognised organisations and institutions such as the University of Sydney or the Institute of

Executive Coaching. This issue of training organisations influencing standards through their graduates will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5.

Summary

As noted in Chapter 1, coach education and training resulted from the actions of the founders of coaching as a means to develop future coaches. The action of these education and training organisations has reinforced the idea that coaching is a new and different occupation. The combined actions of professional associations and training and education organisations have to some degree convinced clients that coaches are different from ‘other’ occupations. However it is difficult to ascertain which, if any, single action by executive coaches or professional associations has influenced clients to accept this difference.

Final Summary

The claim by executive coaches, professional associations, educators and trainers, and even some clients that coaching is different to “other” occupations appears to be difficult to maintain. The claims are considered flawed on a number of grounds.

The weakest, and most flawed claims, were presented by practicing executive coaches. Executive coaches are predominantly focusing their attention on distancing themselves from consultants, despite the fact that many of them refer to themselves as consultants in the selling process. One significant weakness is that executive coaches are unable to offer a clear definition of coaching to demonstrate a clear distinction and differentiation from other groups. The interviewees presented a common negative theme, one of noting that they were not a consultant or do not undertake activities or roles related to consulting, despite sharing common activities with consultants such as; selling of services, retention of client business and understanding the industry or organisational context where the coaching services are offered. The argument that coaches are experts in the use of coaching processes, skills and tools is tenuous, as many of these skills and tools such as communication, questioning, setting goals and understanding organisational culture, are shared by other occupational groups such as consultants or counsellors.

Grant et al (2010) and Williams (2006) claim that executive coaching is different from other occupations such as consulting, mentoring or counselling through their focus on helping the client. This is achieved through a process of self-discovery of the solutions to their challenges compared to other groups, such as consultants or counsellors, who give the client the solutions. However this is considered weak when compared to consultants who facilitate a collaborative process that aids the determination of a solution.

One case where this claim of difference to consultants could possibly be held valid is that consultants often work with many people at the one time, whereas a coach generally only works with a single coachee at a time, even though a coach may work with more than one person within an organisation at any one time. However, this claim is tenuous when comparing group or team coaching, to a consultant facilitating a problem-solving workshop.

The arguments for differentiation by professional associations, educators and trainers, is somewhat stronger as their agenda is on creating an image of the occupational boundary through their rhetoric, setting of education and training standards and research, that is seeking to demonstrate that there is a “science” of coaching. Professional associations have been successful in creating a separate coach education and training market, however, the skills and knowledge presented within these courses are common to those found in consulting and counselling courses. Again, the coaches claim the difference lies in how these skills and knowledge are applied through a process with the client determining the solution, as compared to consultants and counsellors who use these skills and knowledge to tell their clients the solution.

Finally, many of the cited authors claiming, or justifying, that coaching as an occupation is different from other occupational groups present their case using often unsupported generalisations, with weak validity of their underpinning argument (see Grant (2001); Williams (2006); Kilburg (1997); Joo (2005); Berglas (2002); McGovern et al (2001); Zeus and Skiffington (2000) amongst others). These works might be viewed generally as part of the rhetoric deployed by the occupation, and are presented

without critical questioning or debate. Clarke and Fincham (2002), comment that the literature of consultancy as “essentially self-congratulatory” (p.7), but it is important to note that the claim to a distinct boundary between coaching and other occupations is dubious.

Boundary Setting – The Internal Divide

The occupation of coaching is made up of “a loose amalgamation of segments” (Bucher and Strauss, 1961, p.333), such as executive coaching, life coaching or business coaching. Bucher and Strauss (1961) suggest that segments emerge within a profession (p.326), arguing that “specialties might be thought of as major segments, except that a close look at a specialty betrays its claim to unity, revealing that specialties, too, usually contain segments, and, if they ever did have common definitions along all lines of professional identity, it was probably at a very special, and early, period in their development” (p. 326). Bucher and Strauss’s (1961) discussion highlights the struggle between different groups to control an area within a society such as executive coaching or life coaching, which will often be in conflict or at least have a difference in their approach to coaching.

Accepting the argument that clients now recognise coaching as a separate occupation, even if close examination fails to support such a distinction, as outlined above, coaching has seen internal moves to create groups or segments. In light of this, the broader occupation of coaching has seen the emergence of a number of segments of coaching; executive coaches, business coaches, life coaches, ADHD coaches, intimacy coaches, dream coaches, and so on. The emergence of these segments, outlined above, has been documented in papers by Smith and Sandstrom (1999) and Clegg et al (2005), where both executive coaching and business coaching have attempted to differentiate themselves from other coaches, such as life coaching.

This section will focus on the actions of the three different executive coach actor groups, executive coaches, professional associations, and training and education providers, to differentiate themselves from other forms of coaching. Unlike other

occupations where a distinction is made on the *different tasks* they do, executive coaches seek to establish internal boundaries based on their perception of the *quality* of service they offer compared with other types of coaches. While they might accept that “coaching is coaching is coaching”, executive coaches do see a difference between their work and that of others within the occupation.

Executive coaches routinely distinguish themselves from other coaches on the grounds of offering a higher quality service by being “more business like” and “dealing with business issues”, something “other” coaches could not do. Executive coaches did not normally use “ideological weapons” (Strauss, 1982, p.177) in their discussions of other coaches, such as calling other coaches “technically incompetent”, but on occasion this was implied.

In recognising this move to differentiate specialist executive coaching, professional associations such as the APECS in the UK and the ICCO in America emerged to lay claim to representing executive coaches as a distinctive group. These specialist professional organisations see themselves as different from “other” coach associations, such as those representing life coaches. Part of this claim is that they represent executive coaches who are working in an environment where their experience as managers is important.

The next section of this chapter will explore the “ideological weapons” (Strauss, 1982, p. 177) used by the executive coaches and certain professional associations, in keeping their element of coaching clear of “others” within coaching. The “others” explored in this next section will be limited to life coaches as these represent the largest body of coaches with the potential to negate any claim to distinctiveness, and business coaches, whose work by title and definition appear to be close to executive coaches.

Life Coaching

There is no agreed definition of life or personal coaching, though interestingly the ABS (2009) lists Life Coaching as a separate occupation, something not accorded executive

coaching. As discussed in Chapter 1, it broadly focuses on an individual's personal goals and the related actions to help an individual attain those life goals for greater personal effectiveness and satisfaction.

Grant (2005) has defined life coaching as:

...a holistic approach in which the client spends time examining and evaluating their life, and then systematically making life-enhancing changes with the support of a coach. (Grant, 2005, p. 5)

A claim for differentiation from life coaching by executive coaches, is that life coaches lack a breadth and depth of coach education or training, to cope with the range of problems presented by the executive clients working with complex organisational settings.

Those sorts of situations (*a case where a client had been beaten by their spouse*), when we think about coaching, popular coaching, that the type of coaching you get in your standard six-week training course, 'I'm going to be a life coach'. These people aren't trained to (*deal with*) this type of issue. I think this is where coaching has potentially really done a disservice out there in the market place. (Psychologist/Executive Coach)

The above quote demonstrates the claim by executive coaches that life coaches are poorly trained, and are not skilled to deal with significant problems such as spousal abuse that may manifest themselves when dealing with clients in the workplace. The further claim is that the general public is "unaware" of the claimed potential skills limitations of life coaches. Spence and Grant (2005, p.145) support this claim; "the title 'life coach' has been adopted by a diverse range of people with vastly different levels of training and experience, and skills and methods".

However, this is considered to be the tip of the iceberg in an occupation that lacks a depth of empirical evidence to substantiate many claims. The practitioner literature commonly conflates life and executive coaches, and this vagueness has allowed life coaches to label themselves and seek work as executive coaches. It is this vagueness of

what a life or personal coach does and perceived lack of appropriate training and experience that attracts criticism from executive coaches.

The challenge for executive coaches is that while they may criticise life coaches and claim to offer a different service, some executive coaches recognise that they may, and do, offer life-coaching as part of their service. One of the executive coaches described it as part of being a coach:

Electricity, we use it for so many different things, but it's from the same source, it is electricity and that's how I see coaching. (Executive Coach)

This raises the question of whether different coaching segments have the same or different tools, models, techniques or skills. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5, but suffice to note here that coaching tools, models, techniques or skills would appear to be common across all coaching segments. It is the depth of training and perceived experience and abilities that are claimed to make the difference.

As I said, the spectrum is there are life coaches at one end and consultants at the other and a whole lot of players in the middle. We've tried to stay at the business coaching end and been positioned in the business coaching end. It's been very important for us to make sure that we stay in that position. We don't do life coaching. We, by default, end up in what the market would call executive coaching. (Executive/ Business Coach)

The above demonstrates this conundrum and a lack of clarity around their work. While executive coaches claim that they do not do life coaching, they do admit to doing "some" life coaching. This lack of clarity was not apparent to the coaches, as one executive coach said "I don't know how to do life coaching, it bores me to tears, and I have no idea how to do it." Yet when pushed they admitted that some of their assignments related to what could be called life coaching. Hence the conundrum, if life or personal executive coaching is about "examining and evaluating their life" (Grant, 2005, p. 5), and work constitutes a part of a person's life time, then executive coaching must in some way incorporate life coaching.

Furthermore, the claim by executive coaches of being “bored” and “no idea how to do it” reflects a mindset that executive coaches do not want to be branded or labelled a life coach. This represents an interesting psychological contract (Rousseau 1998, 1995; Schein 1978) in how and why executive coaches make the claim that they either cannot or have no interest in working as a life coach. The influence of this position from professional association rhetoric will be explored later, however, it is suggested that branding and remuneration may play a significant role in this reasoning of why executive coaches claim the point of difference that they are not a life coach.

If you are an executive coach then, I suppose you need to know something about executive management so that, take it as read...So for example, life coaching you approach it as buyer beware. In the executive, managerial or corporate rounds it is very much through reputation. So, with reputation it needs to be a little bit...well if you don't have a reputation and you want to give it a try then you prove yourself pretty quickly along. (Executive Coach)

The above reiterates this view of “buyer beware”, with life coaches, but stresses the point on reputation. This argument presupposes that executive coaches, compared to life coaches, have experience as an executive and have thereby established their reputation as both an executive and a coach, something a life coach would be unable to claim. While this claim of difference and being able to offer more than a life coach has some strength, but it still fails to support the argument that executive coaching is different based on the actual tools, models and techniques used, compared to life coaching. Furthermore, executive coaches lay claim to reputation based on the experience or understanding of executive work. However, in other discussions with coaches on this point, executive coaches were unable to refute similar claims of reputation by successful life coaches.

Life coaching has many paths that are the same... I don't know whether it is fair to say that it is a bit more formulaic than executive coaching. Executive coaching is whatever it is, it's happening with this individual at that point in time and whatever the goal is, whatever the path is for this executive that's the way we will work together. I don't know, is it fair to say that life coaching is a bit more procedural or a bit more structured, I think than executive coaching. (Executive Coach)

Executive coaches do see themselves as “special” with regard to their offering, training and experience, in understanding and dealing with issues arising from complex organisational settings, and coaching psychologists view themselves as being special by the nature of their education and experience as a psychologist. This is significantly different to the brief and generalist training usually offered to life coaches.

Many of the interviewed clients expressed doubt over the ability of life coaches to achieve desired results as executive coaches. As these were all organisational clients, the perception by the executive engaging the coaches was that the coaches needed to demonstrate their ability to work within an organisational setting. As one client said, “a life coach wearing beads and kaftans versus executive coach”, would “never be let loose” on the people for whom she had responsibility. This reflects the general belief of the interviewed organisational clients that life coaches’ appearance and image makes them unsuitable for executive coaching. Other clients with similar views noted,

...having that business insight, business understanding, is very important here. Also, I’m just thinking of all my coaches now, they have all had some exposure in professional services environments, they have either worked in those environments themselves or have coached extensively in those environments. (Client)

I have a real bugbear with life coaching, I think it’s a crock basically and there shouldn’t be a market for it. I’ve seen too many people say, ‘I’m going to be a coach’ and they have no qualification, except that a high level of altruism probably, want to help... It’s just marketing. Does it actually ‘empower people’, and ‘change their life’, anybody can be a coach. I could go, ‘I’m going to be a coach’. Potentially, going to blow up in the faces of the coaches with a lot of ethics and integrity because it would be like say the financial planning industry, there’s a lot of charlatans out there who are just interested in making a quick buck. So that’s a real danger for the industry and I don’t know if the industry bodies that are springing up help, maybe things have changed, maybe you have to go through quite strict criteria to become a coach. I don’t think so. (Client)

Both these quotes indicate that despite the clients' apparent personal requirement for a coach to have had exposure to a business environment, the latter comments reflect the concerns of organisational clients regarding poorly trained and experienced coaches. The professional associations and executive coach training and education organisations would appear to have successfully convinced clients that only executive coaches trained by them are qualified and capable. The interviewed clients reaffirmed this, as their perception is that life coaches are poorly trained coaches. But whether their views are based on their experience of life coaches as being poor in their delivery of coaching, or that it was from professional associations or educator and trainers telling them that life coaching were poorly trained it was not clear.

Furthermore, as one executive coach educator noted, the claims made by life coach training organisations are “not outrageous” and are probably “fine for the commercial market”; they are inadequate for executive coaching. This strengthens the claim for difference, that executive coach training and education offers a higher quality coach. This point of difference is also reflected in the training and education cost for executive coaches compared to life coaching. In 2012, the Life Coaching Institute of Australia offers a Certificate IV in Life Coaching for \$3500 and a Diploma for \$6000, the Coaching Institute offers a Certificate IV in Life Coaching with 50 hours of contact time over six months, to Life Coaching Australia offering five non accredited classes for \$500. This compares to \$22,000 for the University of Sydney's Master of Organisational Coaching and \$6000 for the Institute of Executive Coaching Certificate IV in Coaching Skills for the Workplace.

The claim for industry body regulation to control standards in coaching is an interesting one and will be addressed later in this chapter. What is important at this stage is the reality that organisational clients perceive a difference, albeit a rather tenuous one, based on prior managerial experience rather than on coach qualifications, especially life coaching, and the training and education market has created a perception of difference based on offering and price.

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

A number of executive coach educators and trainers expressed unease with life coach schools, as they can be seen as potential competitors. This perception has seen executive coach education and training organisations position themselves through the use of executive coaching in their organisational name, e.g. the Institute of Executive Coaching, College of Executive Coaching and Centre for Executive Coaching as compared to a leading life coach training organisation, the Coaching Institute.

Somewhat disturbingly, one life coach school that stated that the students would learn important differences between coaching and counselling, also stated that coaching was an appropriate intervention for dealing with anxiety and that coaching delivered ‘increased energy that transforms your life. Watch your energy levels, passion for living and youthfulness soar to new heights. Your health issues, sleepless nights and anxiety patterns dissolve. Your ideal weight, lust for life and sex drive as you live the life you want’. I’m signing up [laughter]... These are the claims made about the owners or teachers and this is my favourite, ‘qualified as a home economist, cordon bleu chef and author’ [laughter]. And this person’s particular thing was that they turned down being placed on an advanced cordon bleu chef course in Italy. I thought that was great. (Educator)

The above reflects the area of concern expressed by executive coach educators and trainers, that life coach schools generally overlook critical topics in their programs and also failed to guide coaches through the importance of creating a referral management system for those clients in need of specialist psychological help. Whether this is a claim that executives exhibit higher levels of psychological or mental health issues compared to the average citizen is not clear, however, the interviewed executive coach education and training organisations have clearly included awareness of mental health in their courses.

...they asked people if the client gave you a gift, was there an ethical issue? If you have sexual relationships, was there an ethical issue? Those sort of standard things. If they didn’t have a professional background, most of the life coaches said they didn’t see any problem with any of those issues... But when I heard that, I had suspected it and this is why I was absolutely appalled and why I’ve got a problem with life coaches. That why I bring

that (*ethics*) in the program. I don't see ethics as right or wrong. I see ethics as a conversation that has to be had because it's in grey areas. We do that each time. (Trainer)

The above concern has strong links to the inclusion of ethics within executive coaches' training. This is another area where the executive coach educators and trainers felt that there was a difference.

Executive coach educators and trainers expressed the view that given the context of executive coaching, related courses need to include ethics. Whether this is a reflection of our times is not the point of discussion, the reality is that this is perceived by both the educators and clients as important, and presents another point of difference between executive coaching and life coaching. As noted by one trainer, they felt the exclusion of ethics within training left life coaches without a "guide or compass".

The challenge for professional associations is that many coaches perceive themselves as being an executive coach but do not see any value in being a member of a generalist professional association. This is reflected by many of the interviewed executive coaches who did not have an express allegiance to a professional body. In fact the majority of interviewed executive coaches stated that they were *not* members of the major professional associations such as the ICF and the ICFA. When asked why they were not members, many coaches complained that the professional associations did not have the strength to control member quality standards as compared to professional associations in medicine and law. As one of the coaches said:

I was actually talking to someone last year who is a member of the ICF and I asked, they said 'you should become a member' and I said 'what do you do to become a member?' she said 'Just pay your money?' [laughter] and I thought, no that's not what I consider to be [useful]... I know that some people pay their money to become members but...at the moment there hasn't been any fallouts from the way I have been working. (Executive Coach)

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

The above reflects the challenge for a developing occupation. While the generalist coaching associations claim that “coaching is coaching is coaching” and that trying to make a distinction between the various categories was not helpful, executive coaches, clients, and educators and trainers were making the distinction.

So I think, without being trite about it, in many respects coaching is coaching is coaching. You know, the concept is different, the way you market it and what I think you are working with, the approach in my view is pretty much the same. Whether it’s an executive you are working with or whether it’s kind of life coach it’s a balance of what you want to do.

(Professional Association - Generalist)

Herein lies the challenge for the generalist professional associations. The leaders of these associations saw the opportunity and as noted above have attempted to create the perception that coaching is a separate occupation. By needing to be attractive to all comers, they have left themselves open to divisions along lines of intra-occupational segmentation.

I think coaching in organisations is significant. It has a much, much higher degree of consistency of quality than personal coaching, because it has got a higher threshold of accountability. It is accountable to organisations and organisational representatives and it’s easier to measure, it is defined right at the beginning and it is easier to figure out if it worked or didn’t work. Well, easy, that’s an exaggeration but it’s possible to figure out if it worked or it didn’t work. So, there is a higher degree of quality consistency in executive coaching I think than in other types of coaching like, well maybe career coaching or even personal coaching. (Professional Association - Specialist)

So, I think there is a divide and people can be a bit sensitive about it by saying, well, these people who coach in organisations make more money, they think they are finer or more sophisticated. The fact is that the threshold of competency is higher when you are hired by an organisation than by an individual because there is more at stake. So, I don’t know if it is a huge schism, but, there is a degree of difference. (Professional Association - Specialist)

Of all the different segments of coaching, executive coaches have made the strongest claims for being a distinctive group. As noted above the main motivation for this would appear to be image and remuneration. The strength of this segmented market has seen the emergence of professional associations to cater for specialist executive coaches. While they acknowledge common elements, they claim that there is a difference across the different types of coaching and are active in promoting this difference. As one of the specialist professional association representatives noted: “you don’t want to be elitist about it but on the other hand there does need to be a distinction.” I believe that this captures the essence of the difference that executive coaches are attempting to create, a belief that executive coaching is superior to other forms of coaching.

The view that the early professional associations catering to a general membership did not adequately represent the needs of executive coaches was reflected by a number of executive coaches who admitted to being members of professional associations but limited their involvement to conferences, and even then they often commented “I don’t feel at home”. A common theme from executive coaches was that they felt they were different. As one executive coach said “they (*meaning life coaches*) are related but a different profession, mainly personal coaching” an area that was not “their area”. This demonstrates the success of the pioneers of executive coaching to create a perception of distinctiveness among in those that claim to be an executive coach. As part of my discussions with executive coaches, I found many of them were not members of the ICF, and they did not see the ICF as being part of what they saw as their “professionalism”.

As a result a number of specialist executive coach professional associations have emerged, such as the University of Sydney Coaching and Mentoring Association (USCMA), Association for Professional Executive Coaching, Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching and International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations and Supervision.

The area where the difference between executive coaching and life coaching appears to be stronger is in the area of research and publications. The emergence of specialist

executive coach professional associations would appear to be a move by the leaders of these groups to strengthen the claim for executive coaches as being different to other forms of coaching. By comparison to other forms of coaching, executive coaching has managed to generate the lion's share of research and publications. Whether this is a reflection of the need to justify the segmentation to the highly wealthy client base is unclear. What is clear is that executive coaching has clearly differentiated itself from life coaching in the minds of those that count the most, the clients.

The claims to difference between executive coaches and life coaches appear to be stronger than others. As executive coaches argue, their level of coaching involves much more training, and potentially may include a university course. Whereas training for life coaches can be achieved in a two-day course. While this may be the case, the difficulty of sustaining strong claims to distinctiveness by executive coaches can be seen in the negative language that is frequently used: that is, they assert that they are not life coaches, but admit to providing a life coaching service when and if required.

However, the assertion that executive coaching is different is most strongly put forward by the education and training bodies, and to some extent the claim appears to be accepted by organisational clients. The executive coach training and education segment has clearly created a point of difference from life coaches through qualification standards, course content and training costs. This difference has been accepted by the clients through the belief that only qualified executive coaches are able to offer quality coaching services to their executives.

A lesser challenge has been demonstrating a difference between executive coaching and business coaching.

Business Coaching

Business coaching has emerged as a separate coaching segment and has had minor success in claiming a separate market. The leading business coach professional

organisation, the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC), launched their definition of business coaching in 2007 and revised it in 2011.

Business coaching is the process of engaging in regular, structured conversation with a ‘client’: an individual or team who is within a business, profit or nonprofit organization, institution or government and who is the recipient of business coaching. The goal is to enhance the client’s awareness and behavior so as to achieve business objectives for both the client and their organization.

Business coaching enables the client to understand their role in achieving business success, and to enhance that role in ways that are measurable and sustainable. The coaching process may take different forms (e.g., individual or team coaching) and involve different goals (e.g., problem solving, career and succession planning, leadership/executive development, creation of high-performing teams), but throughout there is a clear focus on the business objectives of both the client and the organization.

This dual focus is what distinguishes business coaching from other types of coaching. The business coach helps the client discover how changing or accommodating personal characteristics and perspectives can affect both personal and business processes. Successful coaching helps the client achieve agreed-upon business outcomes as an individual or team within the context of an organization.

Business coaching establishes an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect, safety, challenge and accountability to motivate both the client and the coach. To that end, the business coach must conduct an ethical and competent practice, based on appropriate professional experience, business knowledge and an understanding of individual and organizational change. (WABC, 2011)

A potential problem for business coaching is that this definition and market positioning too closely resembles consulting. Furthermore, both internal and external coaches can practice it, whereas executive coaches see themselves as intrinsically external. Another

point of difference is that executive coaches only focus on the individual, whereas business coaches also conduct team and organisation wide coaching.

Clegg et al (2005) reinforce this recent definition of business coaching as:

Business coaching also differs from other forms of coaching (e.g. life-coaching and executive coaching which are person specific) in that the focus is on skill development of the client, which is required to achieve business outcomes, rather than on the personal or career goals of the person being coached (p.219).

Other points of difference between business and executive coaching arose in the interviews.

Whereas a business coach is much more, to me anyway, usually working in small to medium sized organisations and usually working with the director, MD whatever and then some of the direct reports, but to get a business outcome as opposed to ‘who am I and what’s my leadership and how does that impact on other people’, which would be an executive coach in my opinion. (Executive Coach)

My definition of a business coach would be someone who could coach, whether it be small, medium or large size business manager through the entirety of their business, through the whole thing from managing people through to business and finance, marketing examples of corporations, etc. (Executive Coach)

Business coaching sits a bit further up the scale for us and that scale would look like, working with businesses, the owners and everybody in the business and potentially, ultimately skilling them up on how to respond, deliver, get consistency into the business, using frameworks, so everybody can understand and relate to, communicate, absorb, pass on. (Executive Coach)

These remarks reflect the notion that business coaching is more related to small to medium size businesses. Grant and Zakon's (2004, p.10) research on coaching of ICF members also confirm this difference. Their research indicated that those coaches involved in business coaching, saw small to medium size business coach as part of their purview, and this was as a point of difference between corporate/executive coaching.

Further to this is the implied notion of time. Whereas executive coaching has been noted as being different from other occupations, consulting in particular, for its short time focus, business coaching would appear to imply a long term and strategic relationship with a client that has clear linkages with the overall businesses performance. This reinforces the argument of executive coaches that business coaching is more like consulting than coaching.

However, most clients appear to be less convinced that there is a difference between executive and business coaching. One client did indicate that *executive* coaching was an area where her managers would find coaching useful, but she stated:

I think it's just a label... There may need to be further definitions around the different types of coaching, like the life, the business, the executive, whatever, just some definitions around that because I think there's a lot of confusion in the market there... I call it business coaching, that's what I call it here. I refer to it like that all the time. I don't just call it coaching, I don't call it executive, it's not a term that we use here. They [the organisation] don't see the value of that in the business world, [so] I call it business coaching. (Client)

This client indicated that she called it whatever the organisation she worked for wanted to call it, be it business or executive. Another client indicated that she did not see the need to differentiate what type of coaching they offered.

I don't see a lot of distinction between say for instance executive coaches or business coaches, in the way that people position themselves or market themselves, whether they may have that distinction I'm not sure. Thinking of conversations I've had with different companies over the last few weeks, they're not distinguishing that. (Client)

Business coaching has failed to gain a point of difference in the market place compared to executive coaching. This is a reflection of the lateness to market compared to executive coaching (WABC, 2011 positioning) and the blurring of the boundary between business coaching and consulting. Whatever the reason, executive coaching is clearly seen by those with the most influence in the market, the executive coaches, coach educators and trainers and the clients, that executive coaching is different from other types of coaching.

Final Summary

Those involved in executive coaching have sought to create boundaries internal to the coaching occupation by seeking to create the perception that the work of executive coaches is distinctive in various ways. In establishing an internal boundary, as with an external boundary, the strength of the claim lies with the response of the clients.

While executive coaches claim not to offer life coaching services, the reality is that many do. The actual challenge here is that as executive coaching focuses on the working life of an executive, you cannot, as some may claim, assert that work is not a part of an individual's life.

Nevertheless, the clients support this claim of differentiation. There appeared to be a demand by clients for executive coaches to have some experience within an organisational setting as part of their capacity to deal with the issues raised by the executives in the coaching assignments. In addition to this demand for experience, other points of difference were raised by from the coach educators and trainers for the topics of mental health and ethics to be included in the executive coaches' repertoire of knowledge. These points of difference and growth in the executive coaching market have encouraged specialist professional associations to emerge, which has further strengthened the position of difference. Further strengthening this difference is the failure of life coaching to respond to the demands of the educators and trainers and the needs of the coaches.

In the case of business coaches, their claim for difference is considered weak, primarily because they appear too similar to consultants and secondly because they have been late to market compared to executive coaches.

Conclusion

As Abbott (1988) claims, boundary setting is an important part of establishing an area of expertise. In the case of executive coaching, this requires executive coaches, professional associations, and educators and trainers to try to distinguish their area of expertise from other occupations. Though, to do this requires executive coaching not only to separate their occupation from “others”, such as consultants, by claiming special expertise, but it also requires making a claim from *within* the occupation, to distinguish, for example, life coaches from executive coaches.

While it is important for executive coaches to make sure that they can separate themselves from other occupations, they also face the need to differentiate themselves from other types of coaching. Executive coaches use “ideological weapons” in discussing the work of other coaches. Executive coaches claim that “other” coaches, mainly life coaches, are not providing a “proper” service to executives, and that what “other” coaches are providing is of an “inferior nature” when it comes to coaching executives. It would appear from my discussions with clients that executive coaching has had a partial victory in this area when the claim is made against life coaches. Though it would appear to be dubious as to whether executive coaches can make the same claim against consultants, especially as they will often “sell” themselves as consultants, so losing the clarity they had sort to establish.

The claims being made by the professional associations and executive coaches to being so different that they are a distinctly separate occupation are considered dubious. However, these claims to being different appear to have gained support from clients. Clients have accepted that executive coaches are different from life and business coaches, and are offering a service that is apparently beneficial to their business. While executive coaches can, and do, make the claim for difference, this is not likely to

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support the claim by professional associations or educators and trainers that executive coaching is substantially *different* to other occupations or segments, such that it would enable a successful claim for professionalization. Therefore the question as to whether it is important to have this difference clearly demarcated by the various actors or whether it is “fake it till you make it” is enough. These issues will be examined further in Chapter 7.

The next chapter will explore the use the qualifying process by the three main actor groups; executive coaches, professional associations and educators and trainers as a method of creating further difference.

Chapter 5

The Qualifying Process

Introduction

This chapter examines what deliberate actions occupations' leaders undertake when attempting to professionalise an emerging occupation. In particular this chapter expands on the justification argument proposed by Greenwood et al (2002) (see Figure 1). Greenwood et al (2002) state that an occupation can achieve theorization, first, by specification of general organisational failing, second, by justification as to why the abstract possible solutions offered by the occupation are reasonable and third, gaining moral and/or pragmatic legitimacy. It follows on from the discussion in Chapter 2 by examining the attempts made to establish minimum qualifications for executive coaches, and explores the actions of executive coaching professional association in their pursuit of social closure. That is, the exclusion of others from executive coaching's knowledge, education, training and credentials in their endeavours for executive coaching to gain recognition as a profession. Some of the professional organisations are pursuing credentialing but are ignoring, or failing to pursue, government intervention to restrict the term to qualified coaches. The question remains, why?

Social closure describes the actions used by a profession or occupation to exclude potential competitors from encroaching on their knowledge and practice domain. Social closure is a process of creating barriers to entry and was initially discussed by Weber (see Collins, 1979; Murphy, 1988; Parkin, 1979).

Weber (cited in Collins, 1979) argues that certification is used as a rational means for occupations to evaluate the suitability of a candidate, *but* it is *also* a source of closure. Closure is the creation of barriers to entry, the management or control of the supply and

demand for their market and a defence against employers who may seek to change conditions of employment (Larson, 1977; Macdonald, 1995; Weber, as cited in Collins, 1979). A common example is restrictions on entry to the occupation or profession via certification or qualification. Closure can also be attained through language, symbolic acts and even physical control (Roscigno et al, 2007).

These actions are used to justify a specialist's ability to charge a higher fee than a generalist. In other words the profession maximises their market advantage and economic value, through successfully convincing their clients, employers and other occupations that their claim over specific knowledge and skills is both unique and expert.

Weber's belief that certification is a source of closure was supported and expanded by other authors (see Larson, 1977; Collins, 1979; Parkin, 1979; Abbott, 1988; Murphy, 1988; Macdonald, 1995). Closure theorists, such as Parkin (1979), Collins (1979) and Murphy (1988) have focused their attention on established professions, such as medicine; they have not given emerging professions much attention.

Larson (1977) and Macdonald (1995) argue that social closure is about *improving the profession as a group*, and that controlling the market is critical to achieving social closure. Therefore, market closure remains an integral element towards attaining social closure. Murphy (1988) claims that closure is more than just credentialing; it is a complex set of procedures. He argues that credentialing is more than proving that the holder has a certain level of skills and knowledge that meet a profession's entry and practice criteria, rather it is more about how the credentials are *marketed* and *sold*. In my research, the actors in this process are not only the public, but also the coaches, and potential coaches, themselves.

Freidson (1986) argues that: "Professions (are) those occupations that have in common credentials testifying to some degree of higher education and that are prerequisites for holding jobs. Higher education presupposes exposure to a body of formal knowledge, a professional 'discipline'" (p. xii). Furthermore he argues that the profession requires "a

strong system of credentialing” (1983, p.287) as a means of controlling who is able to undertake specific work.

An occupation, wishing to be considered a profession, needs to establish an area of exclusivity around their work. It is what Larson (1977) refers to as “cognitive exclusiveness” (p. 15) that is created around their area of expertise. Once this is established the occupation can then seek to introduce the “production of professional producers” (p.16) that will have sufficient expertise to produce a service that will support the occupational exclusiveness. The institutional mechanisms such as a license, qualifying examination or diploma will result. Larson (1977) describes this as having a product that can be sufficiently intangible to stop it being traded as a commodity, but at the same time be sufficiently standardised to allow it to be differentiated from other services. Winch and Schneider (1993) referred to this as “standardised intangibility” (p.924).

A challenge for emerging knowledge-based occupations, of which executive coaching is one, is that the professional knowledge of formally recognised professions is based on the accepted technical-rational approach to knowledge. This is explicit knowledge developed through years of research, codified in the literature and applied to practice (Schön, 1983). However, as argued by Schön (1983), new tacit knowledge based practices, which are “something you know”, are internal to the occupation and are based on a practitioner’s experience and their ability for reflection. This has the potential to cloud claims for specialist knowledge and skills for emerging knowledge based occupations that are based on this newer form of generated knowledge.

The belief by executive coaching professional associations is that if executive coaching is to be considered a *profession* it needs to demonstrate the characteristics they believe are associated with professional status. A key component of this requires persons engaged in the practice of executive coaching to have specialist knowledge and distinctive skills. This specialist knowledge and distinctive skills need to be recognised by clients, the education system and importantly the wider community. To achieve this, the professional associations, both generalist and specialist, believe that a coach, no

matter what area they elect to practice in, needs to be certified. In other words, they need to have acquired this knowledge in a similar way to traditional professions.

As noted in Chapter 2, government plays a major role in established professions by regulating the granting of licenses and standards for education and practice. However, the government is yet to intervene in the education and practice standards for executive coaching and there are no licence requirements to practice as an executive coach.

In this chapter I will examine “standardised intangibility” (Winch and Schneider, 1993) as a social closure technique being used by the executive coaching professional associations and the executive educators and trainers, in their efforts to have executive coaching recognised not just as a separate occupation, but as a profession.

The executive coaching professional associations have been very clear how they hope to achieve professional status, which is to achieve social closure through credentialing. However, to establish credentials it is necessary to agree on the core skills and competencies of an executive coach. Therefore, I initially sought the views of all interviewed actors as to their understanding and interpretation of executive coaching’s core skills and competencies.

However, as I explored this in depth with professional association leaders, executive coaches and coach educators and trainers it became apparent there was no agreement or even clarity on executive coaching’s core skills.

The remainder of the chapter will explore the reputed core skills needed to practice as an executive coach from the perspective of the different actors and how this helps them in attempting social closure.

Executive Coach Skills and Competencies: What is the Difference?

As outlined in Chapter 4, according to ANZSCO, a skill is defined as an ability to behave or act in an effective way to achieve an objective given a specific context. An occupation requires a repertoire of skills requiring a field of knowledge, specific tools and equipment, in addition to the materials to produce the goods or services (ABS, 2009). While the skills for many occupations may be clear, as discussed in Chapter 1, there is no agreement on the core repertoire of skills required to practice as an executive coach. Furthermore, the general and executive coaching literature and professional associations regularly interchange the terms skills and competencies. An example of this is Bono et al (2009), in their survey of executive coaching practice they included, “Counseling skills: Capacity to use skills consistent with the psychodynamic, person-centered, modeling, or goal-setting approaches to psychological therapy” as a competency. However, they also included these under personal qualities “Other personal qualities: Courage, curiosity, perceptiveness, humor, intuition” (p.385).

The Australian National Centre for Vocational Education and Research notes that a competency is “an industry-determined specification of performance, which sets out the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to operate effectively in employment.” This is similar to the definition of a competency adopted by the American Psychological Association from their 2002 special conference on competencies (Falender et al., 2004). Falender et al (2004), drawing on over 1000 articles focusing on professional competence, defined competence as; “the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community served” (p.773). From this, competency was more broadly defined as, “knowledge, skills, and values, which requires the attainment of knowledge as the first step, with attention to performance and outcomes as subsequent steps” (Falender et al., 2004, p.773). A theme arising from the American Psychological Association conference is that professional competence relates to applying expert knowledge and methodologies to understand and assist their clients. It is therefore not surprising, to see this theme emerge in the psychology coaching literature (Grant, 2006).

Leaders of the professional associations interviewed were all practicing coaches and, regardless of which domain of coaching they represented, when asked “what are the key

skills” to be a coach, they unanimously agreed on the key skill areas of; questioning, listening, being present and being self-aware.

Comments from professional association representatives included, “it’s around presence and listening ... where you need to be for your client so that in order to be reflective, ... in some respects, intuitive in that that’s what you want, the skill of listening beyond what’s being said and actually picking up the signals around what’s really going on, what’s the best for the client”. Also from executive coaches “...being self-aware and being present ... effective listening and those sorts of things and questioning skills that are essential” and educators and trainers “amazing listener and to be able to reflect that back and to be able to use that and to be aware of all those things like inter personal communication... all those listening skills and so be able to really, really hear your client”.

When asked whether these skills were common for *all* types of coaches, in other words these were core skills to being a coach, the responses were a unanimous yes, they were core, regardless of the type of coaching was being undertaken.

Respondents from specialist professional associations and executive coaches, as well as some trainers and educators working with executive coaches, also listed the ability to understand business skills as being critical to being an executive coach. As one of the specialist professional association representatives said, “ ...you need some knowledge of business, you don’t necessarily have to have been a CEO but you do need to understand about structures in organisations and how they impact”.

A critical question arising from these interviews is that while all of the interviewed groups listed the above as the core skills essential for both executive and general coaching, none were clear on where *these* particular skills came from and *why* they are identified as *the* core skills, despite asking a number of questions regarding skills during the interview process. Subsequent to the interviews and during coaching conferences I have directly asked the question to representatives of coaching professional associations, executive coaches and coach educators on “why are these the core skills” and the general response is that these were the skills identified by the early authors

(Whitmore, 1996, 2002; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002) and agreed by subsequent authors and academic research (Grant and Green, 2001; Grant and Cavanagh, 2004).

Further evidence of how these skills and competencies have evolved to become identified by executive coaches, and their professional associations, as *the* skills, can be gained from the following two reports. As part of the Global Convention on Coaching held during 2007 and 2008, a comparison of general coaching competencies as espoused by two professional coach associations, the International Coach Federation (ICF) and the International Association of Coaches (IAC) competencies and practices was made. Table 2 summarises these. Of note the IAC revised their coaching proficiencies to coaching masteries in 2007. For comparison, Bono et al (2009) conducted a practitioner survey of executive coaching competencies and a summary of these is listed in Table 3.

Table 2: Comparison of Generalist Coach Professional Association Competencies

	ICF International Coach Federation (Core Coaching Competencies)	“Pre 2007 IAC” International Association of Coaches (15 Coaching Proficiencies)	“Post 2007 IAC” International Association of Coaches (The Coaching Masteries)
1	Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards	Engages in provocative conversations	Establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust
2	Establishing the coaching agreement	Reveals the clients to themselves	Perceiving affirming and expanding the client’s potential
3	Establishing trust and intimacy with the client	Elicits greatness	Engaged listening
4.	Coaching Presence	Enjoys the client immensely	Processing in the present
5.	Active Listening	Expands the client’s best efforts	Expressing
6.	Powerful questioning	Navigates via curiosity	Classifying
7.	Direct Communication	Recognises perfection in every situation	Helping the client set and keep clear intentions
8.	Creating Awareness	Hones in on what is most important	Inviting possibility
9.	Designing Actions	Communicates cleanly	Helping the client create and use supportive systems and structures
10.	Planning and goal setting	Shares what is there	
11.	Managing progress and		Champions the clients

	accountability		
12.		Enters new territories	
13.		Relishes truth	
14.		Designs supportive environments	
15.		Respects the clients' humanity	

Bono et al's (2009) focus was to provide a snapshot of executive coaching competencies. This was done by exploring from the perspective of psychology trained and non-psychology trained executive coaches of "who should be conducting executive coaching and what training, experience, and credentials these individuals should have" (p. 362). They initially surveyed almost 7,000 members from the ICF, Society of Consulting Psychology and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology and other affiliated groups. From this they identified and emailed surveys to 1,260 executive coaches and received 428 usable responses. Psychologists identified 282 competencies and non-psychologists 531 competencies, of which 12 from psychologists and 52 from non-psychologists were not classifiable because they were too vague (p 385).

Table 3: Bono et al (2009:384-385) Executive Coach Competencies as Identified by Coaches

Executive Coach Competencies
<p>Diagnostic and planning capabilities</p> <p><i>Questioning</i>: Capacity to ask insightful, probing, discovery-oriented questions</p> <p><i>Listening</i>: Capacity to actively listen, hear, and understand the participant</p> <p><i>Communication skills</i>: Capacity to communicate effectively, expressing complex ideas simply</p> <p><i>Assessment</i>: Capacity to identify and analyze key issues, and use data and measurement tools</p> <p><i>Analysis and planning</i>: Capacity to reach grounded assessments and insightful solutions, to use data to solve problems, and to develop specific plans</p> <p><i>Intervention success assessment</i>: Evaluating the success of the coaching intervention, following through with clients after coaching is completed, being focused on achieving results</p>

<p>Intervention and problem solving capabilities</p> <p><i>Large, flexible toolbox:</i> Capacity to use multiple technologies, tools, and methods</p> <p><i>Motivator:</i> Capacity to motivate, encourage, empower, influence, or prompt</p> <p><i>Building relationships and achieving rapport:</i> Capacity to build rapport, make connections, have empathy/compassion</p> <p><i>Counseling skills:</i> Capacity to use skills consistent with the psychodynamic, person-centered, modeling, or goal-setting approaches to psychological therapy</p> <p><i>Feedback:</i> Capacity to give honest, clear, unambiguous, nonjudgmental feedback</p> <p><i>Holding the client accountable:</i> Ability to hold client accountable for client's commitments to the coaching process</p>
<p>Knowledge</p> <p><i>Business knowledge:</i> Understanding business, organizational structure/strategy, culture, politics, leadership</p> <p><i>Knowledge and understanding of human behavior:</i> Knowledge of how people change and learn, broad psychological training, behavioral science background</p> <p><i>Knowledge of participant background:</i> Familiarity with the participant's competence in the area to be coached</p>
<p>Personal qualities</p> <p><i>Authenticity/self-awareness:</i> Self-understanding</p> <p><i>Honesty and integrity:</i> Being honest, ethical, trustworthy</p> <p><i>Other personal qualities:</i> Courage, curiosity, perceptiveness, humor, intuition</p> <p><i>Life and job experience:</i> Having rich personal and professional experiences</p> <p><i>Continuous learning:</i> Being responsible for professional development, pursuing new knowledge, certification</p> <p><i>Self-management and professionalism:</i> Being prepared, on time, maintain professional appearance / demeanor</p> <p><i>Client focus:</i> Being focused on the client, putting the clients' interests first</p>

These two studies reinforce the challenges associated with claiming specific skills and competencies as they share them with psychology and are a subset of other health professional competencies (Epstein and Hundert, 2002).

Davies (1995; 1996) notes that knowledge and associated skills and techniques are often visible and tangible, yet the claimed executive coaching skills are essentially intangible, adding a further degree of difficulty with the claim for exclusivity being made by executive coaches and the related professional associations, educators and trainers. However, implicit skills notably require higher level cognitive processing such as synthesis, critical analysis and evaluation. Executive coaches claim that it is this process, taking declared knowledge and transforming it into procedural knowledge (Schön, 1983), which provides the case for claiming expertise. This would appear to be the implied claim of difference being presented by the interviewed representatives of

the specialist professional associations and executive coaches. However, this implied claim appears to be lacking Larson's (1977) "standardised intangibility" (Winch and Schneider, 1993) test, an important test for certain occupations, claiming differentiation from others.

Furthermore, as I conducted the interviews, and then reviewed and reflected on the interview transcripts, it became apparent that the respondents from professional associations, education and training organisations and interviewed executive coaches did not have a clear weighting of importance of these core skills, especially when asked if these were present for all types of coaching. Nor did they articulate what the concepts of questioning, listening, being present and being self aware, meant in relation to how these core skills are uniquely used in the practice of executive coaching.

Importantly, the professional associations market themselves, or as some cynical clients noted 'preach', that it is these skills that make coaching different from other occupations and additionally it is how coaching should be judged. Yet, as noted earlier, these skills are the same that are claimed by other personal development occupations such as consulting or counselling. This will be examined later in this chapter, but it does raise the issue, whether these core skills are significantly different to support the claim to be a profession, and were these skills necessary for coaching successful?

There was only one identified skill that was raised by the nine specialist psychology-based coaches, and that related to identifying and understanding mental health issues and the process of referral to psychologists by coaches. This will be discussed within this chapter, but to date it has been a slightly controversial topic, as mental health is not an area coaches are expected to handle.

As noted above, the claimed core skills of executive coaching are; questioning, listening, being present and being self-aware. From the professional association, educators and trainers and coaches' perspective it is important that the client is made aware of these particular skills in *coaching* as the benchmark for measuring the effectiveness of coaching. It is argued by professional associations, especially the

specialist associations, that by making skills an important aspect of coaching, it will enhance the perception of credibility by clients.

Credentials

As identified above, credentialing is a complex process of convincing many industry actors of its benefits. If the professional associations are successful it will assist in gaining social closure for the members.

Rey Carr, of Peer Resources Canada, offers one of the few continuous on-line sources of research on coaching and mentoring. Operating since 1975 his on-line coaching and mentoring research base line dates from 2001. Despite the potential questions of validity on his published research, for example biases in selecting participants - which he does acknowledge himself - Carr and Peer Resources does offer a bench mark to explore the challenges relating to credentialing. Carr (2004) identified the growth in coach training organisations from a mere handful in 1996 to over 150 in 2004, offering over 65 different credentials in North America and the UK as well as other countries including Australia. By 2011, Peer Resources list over 450 course offerings with a number of different bodies claiming to act as coach industry accreditors. He has stopped listing the number of credentials, however, based on a growth trend ratio of the 2004 study it is estimated to be over 500 in 2012. This estimate would appear to be supported by Scoular's (2009) claims of 50 separate coach education and training organisations issuing certificates in the UK.

In 2004 Carr conducted an internet poll of visitors to the Peer Resources website regarding their opinions about coach certification. While there are no demographic data of the persons who voted in this poll, the site services members of coaching, mentoring and peer resource networks from across the world. Carr (2004) stresses that this is not a scientifically conducted survey, however, of 2,704 people who cast their votes between over a 13 month period from 1 July 2003 and 30 July 2004. 1,306 (48.3%) of the voters indicated that coach certification was not important. While this could be interpreted as a resounding vote against coach certification and hence credentialing, what was

interesting is the summary of viewpoints presented by those that cast their views on certification. Carr (2004) summarised these viewpoints as:

1. Certification is a political tool.
2. Certification is a marketing tool.
3. Certification is arbitrary.
4. Certification is a revenue generator.
5. Certification is a weak substitute for integrity.
6. Certification exploits the inexperienced.
7. Certification acts as a mark of distinction.
8. Certification protects the public.
9. Certification acts as a beacon (p.3)

The first six on the list indicates that certification did not generate much enthusiasm from the coaches, with some of the comments being derogatory. Only the last three on the list indicated that certification did provide some benefit to others.

The use of certification as a revenue generator may appear to be cynical, however, it is a revenue channel for professional associations and this was confirmed by one general professional association executive at a conference who noted both privately and anonymously, that:

I'm not sure about this coaching credentialing. Sounds like just another way of making us pay more money. (Professional Association – Generalist and Executive Coach)

The Global Coaching Convention (GCC) initiated in 2007, with the actual Convention held in Dublin in 2008, explored credentialing issues as part of the industry's efforts to be recognised as a profession. The credentialing issues taken from the 2007-2008 GCC Professional Status for Coaching are summarised below. It should be noted the GCC and associated Coaching Commons closed in 2008. The reason given was due to the lack of involvement from members, to keep and maintain the momentum; it was not possible for a global coaching convention to be continued.

- The USA, Australia, and the UK offer the largest number of executive coaching certificates and degrees by academic institutions. In the USA alone there are over

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120 academic institutions offering courses in the coaching specialty from a wide variety of academic departments (business, psychology, education, continuing education, executive development, organizational studies, etc.)

- Academic disciplines that offer training in executive coaching specialty differ greatly across countries (e.g. UK, France, and Australia have strong links with psychology whereas academic programs in the USA, Latin America, and Canada offer programs from within a wider variety of disciplines)
- Many consulting/training firms offer executive coaching programs through academic institutions, most of which are controlled and almost exclusively conducted by the consulting/training firms rather than the academic institutions that grant the certificates and/or degrees for those programs.
- Draft guidelines have been developed by the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching and an initiative is underway in the USA, Australia, Canada, the UK, Ireland, and New Zealand to get feedback and possible consensus on those standards.
- The Worldwide Association for Business Coaching (WABC) offers certifications and academic credits through Middlesex University and its UK partner, the Professional Development Foundation (PDF).
- Australia has its own national standards for certification and many proprietary commercial programs have been certified under this standard.
- The vast majority of programs in France are self-credentialed with a wide variety of standards.
- 31 separate coach training programs were reported in the UK which vary significantly by specialization, accreditation, content, theoretical base, and length and format of training. (Adapted from GCC Professional Status for Coaching)

On the basis of the above it could be argued that while credentialing and certification are theoretically viewed as important to the coaching industry, credentialing of executive coach programs remains fragmented both nationally and internationally. The collapse of the GCC is an indicator of the lack of support and willingness to formalise credentialing across the executive coaching world.

The following will examine ongoing actions and views of the different coach actor groups in their pursuit of gaining recognition of executive coaching as a profession.

Professional Associations

Professional coach associations recognised very early the need for credentialing and hence the need to identify skills and competencies to link to those credentials. The following are representative statements of the main professional association actors, as today all coach professional associations have some form of credentialing system linked to their claimed competency framework.

We actually felt the need to look towards the future around the profession itself, looking at some of the issues that would come up on the horizon as we are looking to legitimise the profession. One of those things was regulatory issues and so that's when we determined to create a credentialing program, which started off and we figured, I don't even think we put a timeline on it then. But we figured that it's a good, a dozen years or even up to fifteen or twenty years when we could actually, not only create this, but we could roll it out to be its own individual entity, which by the way has evolved down the line another five or six years, just to have the credentialing aspect to be an independent organisation, separate from the professional association. ... Then we actually moved into co-creating together what the competencies could be and overall, amazingly enough after a year's worth of weekly work meetings, actually it agreed on the competencies for the profession and it was an amazing accomplishment.
(Professional Association - Generalist)

There was a lot of education and lobbying and conversation. There was a lot of taking the core coaching competencies, the credentialing standards and making those well known and understood by the legislator so that they, they had a more complete knowledge and understanding of how we were working. They actually established a self-regulatory environment for

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coaches and to make it very clear the distinction between an individual who is a coach versus an individual who is a psychotherapist. (Professional Association - Generalist)

And are we going to be called Coaching Psychology. We have the interest group, and how do you credential it? That is where the current discussions tend to be going, should we be having practitioner credentialing, and the APS credentials, and what is its relationship to universities? And who will be entering the arena of the whole of the credentialing from another point of view, which I think is probably quite interesting about the future.

(Professional Association - Specialist)

Garman et al. (2000) reinforced the issue of credentialing, with their research on executive coaching articles from mainstream and trade media in the 1990s. They noted that not only were there no recognised standards for executive coaching, such that anyone could offer their services as a coach, but also the only “entry criterion for the profession is a practitioner's ability to solicit clients” (p. 201).

With the professional associations being clear in their intentions to create a credentialing system, what is less clear is specificity relating to the required skills for a coach. The interviewed members of professional associations agreed on the required skills for being a coach, and they are commonly listed on web sites, such as the International Coach Federation (ICF), European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and International Association of Coaches (IAC). However, they were unable to be specific in the competencies that make up these skills.

Well, on our web site, we have eleven core competencies and these have been around now about eight years, nine years. They're still the same and they're fundamental to coaching no matter what the style or what the focus of coaching is. (Professional Association - Generalist)

All of the competencies that are on the website, I totally completely believe in. ... I believe, down to the bottom of my toes, that coaching is coaching is coaching. Competency and way of being and that's what it is, coaching is

coaching is coaching and then, I think I said this as the context, there are a multitude of ways that coaching can express in the world. (Professional Association - Generalist)

We had a number of different competencies and so, you know, they were around human behaviour and the likes of communication, you know, etc. etc. And it was a matter of demonstrating minimum standards and education in those particular areas. (Professional Association - Generalist)

Herein lies the challenge for executive coaching: the representatives of the professional associations, be they generalist or specialist, are unable to articulate skills beyond the broad descriptions of questioning or listening. Examination of the core competencies noted above reveals even greater weaknesses, as many are not only vague but they are also claimed by other occupations.

Professional associations can often be accused of using rhetoric, due of the vagueness of the skills and competencies they claim to be a part of coaching. An example of the challenge confronting the professional association can be found with the ICF competency of “coaching presence”, which requires the coach to be “... present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment”, and to “accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing – “goes with the gut””.

Nevertheless, each professional coach association claims that their competencies are found in their respective training programs and are core to their credentialing process or entry examination. What was clear is that the professional associations see the competencies as standards or markers for coaching to be recognised as a profession. Again, the following is representative of the thinking from all the interviewed professional association representatives.

So we're working towards that, as well as the new membership standards, having credentials, coaches with credentials should have the highest status. The ideal would be for people to see us and be recognised as a profession that would be successful. (Professional Association - Generalist)

Therefore, it is not surprising to find claims from professional association representatives, mostly the specialist associations, that those who *claim* to be executive coaches often lack the skills and competencies needed to be an executive coach. This reflects the findings of early researchers into coaching skills (Garman et al, 2000; Kilburg, 1996; Brotman et al 1998). Richard Kilburg, a psychologist and early author on executive coaching, titled his forward in an edition of the consulting psychology journal “Executive Coaching as an Emerging Competency in the Practice of Consultation” (1996a, p. 59) where he argues, “executive coaching appears to be an eclectic mix of concepts and methods”.

The argument put forward by representatives of professional associations that by not having the necessary skills and competencies, those who claim to be executive coaches have damaged the reputation of coaches generally. Some professional association representatives expressed the opinion that this is a reason why executive coaching has not been recognised as a profession and represents reinforcement of their claims regarding competencies and credentials.

...it stems from anybody can call themselves a coach. Unfortunately, I think there are a lot of things going on in the name of coaching that really aren't necessarily coaching. Well I talked to some of them and they told me that this is what they do for coaching and well, I can do that for myself, or whatever, and not really understanding the deeper nuances of coaching skill sets. (Professional Association - Generalist)

While the above demonstrates broad agreement on skills and competencies across the different coach professional associations, there is one area of competence that has been contentious, it is mental health.

Mental Health

Coach psychologists such as Blattner (2005), Grant (2003) and Kilburg (2004) have argued strongly that coaches, in particular executive coaches, should receive some degree of psychological training on the grounds that understanding mental health issues should be a required skill of a coach.

Additionally a number of specialised professional associations have also listed the recognition and understanding of mental health issues as a key skill. These are predominantly psychology-based associations. These professional associations argue that executive coaches need skills to recognise the signs of mental health issues and the ability to refer the client on to a mental health practitioner. The assumption made by these associations is that executive coaches have a referral network of clinical psychologists. As one of the representative of a specialist professional association said:

And I asked the question, in your coaching, how many people do you see who suffer from either, clinical depression or anxiety? And the general comment was, 'well, no, we deal with the 'normal' population'. When I asked, how many of you are coaching executives? A number of people put up their hand and I again asked the same question, 'how many of you come across clinical depression or anxiety or even sub clinical?' And nobody put up their hand. 'We deal with the more so-called, 'normal' population'. And I said 'Now it is well known, I forget the exact statistics but it is of the order of 25%, 22% to 25% of the so-called 'normal' population who are in that category and of the executives it is significantly higher, almost double.
(Professional Association – Specialist)

Within Australia, mental health has been raised as a major health and social area of under-awareness and funding. As highlighted above, executives are under constant stress to consistently perform in highly dynamic and increasingly complex environments. Statistically, executive coaches will encounter clients with some degree of anxiety, depression or other mental health issue, especially during periods of market turmoil or instability, as has been the case since 2008 and the global financial crisis. The challenge for setting skills or competencies is that while the specialist coach professional associations have identified the broad need for executive coaches to have awareness of these issues, they are unable to agree on what these specific skills should be, beyond being able to recognise a mental health issue.

It is also considered important to match this claim by the psychology-based associations with the expectations of the clients. As noted previously, all of the clients interviewed

were from the Sydney area, and it is possible that the influence of the University of Sydney's Coaching Psychology unit had an impact on the interviews. So while it was not surprising to see the interviewed clients list mental health as a required skill, it was their weighted importance on this skill that is considered worthy of note.

As you can probably appreciate, I've met a lot of people. I mean it's such a growing profession that come in and talk to me about providing coaching services to this firm. The majority of them have one model that they use, and cannot assess mental health, although they may be able to refer to mental health, they don't know how to assess mental health and some aren't supervised or can't even see the value of supervision. They obviously don't get a gig here. (Client)

So while the interviewed coach associations or executive coaches (six specifically mentioned mental health, but twelve recognised it as a issue) did not unanimously identify mental health as a key executive coaching skill, its importance as a skill is increasingly being recognised. Importantly, there is a shift on the discussion of the importance of the need to include mental health within the executive coaching knowledge base from the predominant psychology based journals such the International Journal of Coaching Psychology and Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, to the broader mainstream journals such as Harvard Business Review and Training and Development.

Credentialing

Larson (1977, p.14) claims that “an ideological task to which the rising professions actively contributed” is the process by which knowledge-based occupations seek exclusivity. Ideological persuasion relies on the community believing in the shift, to create exclusivity. So knowledge-based occupations are looking for credentials to make their claim to exclusivity of knowledge.

Different professional coach associations have used credentialing as a juncture to differentiate themselves in the eyes of their members and clients. In particular, executive coach professional associations have strenuously pushed ahead with this

strategy. One appeal used by the professional associations is the basis of risk; for example they may say “Can you be sure of the quality of your coaches, with our qualification you can. Ensure all your coaches have been certified by us.” This is a strategy that has been undertaken by at least one member association, the ICF. At the ICFA (the Australian arm of the ICF) conference in Brisbane, Australia, 2005, the ICF President, Pam Richarde, announced that IBM had agreed that *only* ICF credentialed coaches would be engaged to undertake executive coaching assignments worldwide (Pam Richarde, President of the ICF at the Brisbane Conference). This was an important and critical global announcement, as the ICF has announced it was changing the membership structure, with the introduction of a new certified coach membership category. There would now be two categories, certified coaches who have an ICF credential (this also included coaches seeking an ICF credential, but are not there yet) and affiliates, who do not have an ICF credential.

The above demonstrates the attention coach professional associations and in particular specialist coach professional associations have given to credentialing, especially as executive coaching has grown to be an in-demand service. The success of credentialing lies in the ability of a professional association to convince the purchasers of services offered by its members that credentialing does make a difference. The absence of government regulation requiring coaches to be credentialed means the professional associations have had to sell the need to potential clients what to expect from a qualified coach. This raises two questions, firstly, who *determines* who is qualified to coach, and secondly, how does a professional association *control* the coach qualification production system.

We’ve learned from some of the European coaches since they first embraced credentialing and standards that credentialing has been extremely helpful in growing coaching. And as we grow and develop and more and more coaches decide to gain the credentials it will improve. We are also going to the adverts, doing a public relations campaign, just to promote the credentials process, and have coaches recognise the advantages in that it is worth investing in. (Professional Association – Generalist)

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It's, the advantage of our association, it's not a training school and it's not a financial body. In other words, it's actually a professional body, like a medical association or something like that. It doesn't train people, it doesn't make profit out of training people. It is there to provide some sort of regulation of the profession. (Professional Association – Generalist)

Nationally it began in the US, that's where the programs were. We now have members, 9000 members in 67 countries and we give our credentialing exam in 10 languages. (Professional Association – Generalist)

As the different coach professional association bodies have emerged their strategies to differentiate themselves have resulted in their claim to different competency and credential standards. The result is that there is no agreement on the length of required training, the education standard required, nor who is qualified to conduct this education and training.

For example specialist psychology-based associations argue that only a university postgraduate diploma education is acceptable as a minimum (see Palmer & Cavanagh, 2006).

Absolutely. Without question. I would say about three years worth. If you are coming in, there might be recognition of prior learning or something, but there has to be a bare minimum. Minimum, actually four years probably. It doesn't all have to be psychology but I think it is waiting in the shadows at the moment. (Professional Association – Specialist)

However, other specialist professional associations disagree on length, and the requirement for it to be focused around psychology. Another competing specialist association representative indicated that coaching needs to be included as a subject within broader curriculum, and not be narrowed to just psychology.

I think you need guidelines because I think there is this disparity between what some people think coaching is and what others think it should be. So there needs to be some, you know, education and guidelines around those lines. (Professional Association – Specialist)

At the other end of the spectrum, another representative from a different specialist association agreed on the need for executive coaches to be trained, but not on the length of that training or whether it needed to be university based or conducted by a specialist coach training organisation.

I think that it is necessary for professionals that want to operate as executive coaches to have some type of professional development. And, that there needs to be some type of requirement before a person can call themselves an executive coach. Because right now as you know, there is no barriers to entry. (Professional Associations – Specialist)

The difference of opinions expressed above by professional association representatives is not surprising. In establishing a credentialing system the professional associations initially focused on accrediting the individual coach to their association's standards. However, they generally failed to initially engage the already established coach education and training organisations to have them align their training to the professional association's credential standards. The EMCC was cited as an example of a professional association that did initially engage with at least one education organisation with the objective of accrediting their program.

Oxford Brooks University who have been running an MA in coaching mentoring practice now for some six years. ... You know, they have just become, tide marked they call it by the EMCC. ... I think it seems that the EMCC are really accrediting, you know, training programs and bodies and things. (Professional Association – Specialist)

The expansion of coach education and training, with coach training and education organisations issuing their own certificates and standards, required the professional associations to respond quickly by creating education and training accreditation systems. However, this is now causing a potential dilemma for the associations.

That's not to say that credentialing will stay as it is because ultimately in the long run it would probably become a conflict of interest, when you are credentialing people and you are accrediting schools. (Professional Association – Generalist)

Summary

The professional associations clearly recognised the importance of identifying the skills and competencies they expect their members to demonstrate and established credentialing systems to reinforce the importance of these skills and competencies. They have been very active in selling their credentials to the broader purchasing market. The success of acceptance of credentialing can be gained from the ICF's claim of growth in credentialed coaches from seven who took the first exam in 1998 to over 200 in 2005 (Richarde, Martin and Hault, 2005), to 3,400 in 2007 (ICF 2007 Press Release). While these numbers are impressive, they are coming of a low base and the ICF notes in 2007 the number of credentialed coaches represents only 25 percent of their membership base, or more starkly 75 percent of coaches do not see the need for ICF credentials.

It is noteworthy that the professional associations failed to initially identify the need to control the education and training supply chain. The professional associations have since responded to the universities and coach training organisations issuing their own coach credentials by creating an accreditation system for coach education and training providers. While the growth in the education and training market is a positive sign for the occupation, it is not necessarily for the professional associations, as coaches do not see the need to seek association credentials, as evidenced by the low take up rate by ICF members. This point will be discussed further in the next chapter and in Chapter 7.

Educators and Trainers

As discussed in Chapter 1, the American coach education and training market preceded the professional associations by a number of years. As such the professional associations consider educators and trainers as being coaching occupation's key representatives in interpreting the identified coaching skills and competencies and skills. Nevertheless, the professional associations have had to review their relationship with

education and training organisations as part of their efforts to regain control of credential status within the marketplace.

More broadly, the coaching industry and the professional associations have benefited from the growth in demand for trained coaches, which has allowed a mature competitive coach education and training market to develop. Each major education and training provider is selling either their credentials or the credentials of the professional association they are accredited to.

While the professional associations rely on the education and training organisations to produce coaches, there is no agreement on what the coach development process should look like, or include. This is the main difference between coach trainers and educators. Coach educators and trainers agree that the core coaching skills are questioning, listening, being present and being self-aware. These are reiterated in all “how to” publications or texts on coaching. Where educators differ from trainers, especially when focusing on executive coaching, is in the educators’ belief that coaches require a greater understanding of theory.

...micro skills things like effective listening, those sorts of things that help the conversation take place. There are macro skills that all coaches should have, which are about how to manage their coaching conversation and how to direct it in a particular way, ...sort of solution focused, ...also coming about how their coaching should come from a theoretical basis, so some sort of principles and theories on which they base the coaching conversation throughout... And those theories depend on the sorts of conversations they have had. (Educator)

Well I think what we aim to do is to produce people that could design and run a program in either of those areas, so that they can have the sort of behavioural science, they’d have an understanding of goal setting, hopefully how to design a program and enough knowledge about organisational context to be able to do that. I hope that what we do is we teach enough theory principle that they can take that and then design their own. (Educator)

We added the theory program only in the last few years, so it's an elective for people who want to do it. (Trainer)

A major influence in whether a coaching program includes theory is whether the founders of the coaching program have an academic or practitioner background. Those with formal academic qualifications have included theory whereas those from a practitioner background focus on how use specific models and associated skills without explaining the underpinning theory.

Furthermore, all of the coach educators interviewed have an academic background in psychology, which explains their argument that being a “good executive coach” requires a depth of understanding of not just the theories behind the coaching models, but also adult learning *theory*, human behaviour and basic psychology. Trainers did not hold this view, even those with academic backgrounds; rather they viewed a “good executive coach” as a person who adopts the core skills coaching.

I think there are professional schools that are pretty good about teaching the coaching technologies through practice. So obviously in terms of those kinds of competencies too, listening and all that kind of stuff what most of the schools do fairly well ... and I think the two other things nearest and dearest in my heart so I teach these a lot in my programs are I think you have to have some kind of underlying or for lack of a better word sort of spirituality, ethics, meanings kind of things. (Trainer)

Understand your business methodologies and then, hopefully have some practical experience within that, really focus on leadership and the dynamics within leadership. It's less about consulting and strategic work, etc, though there is strategy built into the process but it is not about consulting to the organisation, its about helping people become more effective self leaders and leaders of others and understand that distinction between leadership and management. So, I mean, that's kind of in a nutshell, trying to help understand that. (Trainer)

Well I think that while being able to be an amazing listener and to be able to reflect that back and to be able to use that and to be aware of all those things like inter personal communication is necessary. I think they also need to have some knowledge of, I mean you could be a life coach and it wouldn't really matter, but, if you wanted to be in the workplace I think you'd need some knowledge of business...I think that you probably do need to have a good bag of tools and things so that you can whip them out, but I think that if you haven't got all those listening skills and you're not able to really, really hear your client...I think to be able to trust, I think you have to have a lot of faith in the client that they can change and understand change and you do need to have some theory behind you. You do need to understand about adult development. You do need to know how adults learn, you do need to know about the theory of motivation and a bit about personality I think, because you need to understand the psyche of humans. (Trainer)

Again there is a reinforcement for executive coaches to have an understanding of organisations, something that is not on the list of *required* skills and as such not a subject covered in most coaching programs, including the University of Sydney's Coaching Psychology program.

The above differences on course content reflect the differences in course length. As an example these programs range from two days to one-year full time.

- The Life Coaching Academy offers Australian training framework approved Certificates III, IV and Diploma in Life Coaching. These programs are offered as either flexible learning or each *level* of the training can be completed in two-day intensive weekend workshops. For example a Certificate IV in Life Coaching has 10 units to be completed. The Certificate IV and Diploma are accredited by the ICF.
- The Institute of Executive Coaching (IEC) offers three levels of training. Each level requires three days of face-to-face training plus evidence of post course practical coaching. Successful completion of Level 3 equates to nine days of face-to-face training and 50 hours of coaching. The IEC also offers an Australian training framework approved Certificate IV issued by the University of Sydney's

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commercial training arm, Sydney Learning. This is a three day face to face program followed by three months of flexible distance learning and coaching practice.

- The College of Executive Coaching in the USA offers a distance education program requiring 125 hours participation including watching a DVD program, attending teleconferences and submitting evidence of coaching practice. This program is accredited to the ICF.
- Ashley Coaching offers the Australian Certificate IV and Diploma Workplace and Business Coaching. For example the Certificate IV is offered over four days face to face with a series of follow up teleclasses and self paced action learning activities. The Certificate and Diploma are accredited with the ICF.
- The University of Sydney Coaching Psychology unit offers a Post Graduate Certificate and Diploma in Coaching Psychology and Master of Science in Coaching Psychology. The Master's degree is one year full time or two years part time. It should be noted this program was initially offered jointly with the School of Business with the degree being Masters in HRM and Coaching. The School of Business withdrew from supporting this program in 2011. This program is not accredited with any professional coach association.

As indicated above, most executive coaching programs offered in Australia are accredited to the ICF, whereas programs offered in England or Europe, such as Oxford Brookes University may offer accreditation to the EMCC or another professional association.

Credentialing

As noted above, coach training preceded the formation of professional associations, so it is no surprise that the coach training organisations offer their own certificates in addition to now offering accreditation to professional associations such as the ICF or EMCC.

We provide certification and it is a high level certification and it is recognised by industry and it is recognised worldwide whether you present those credentials to a blue chip client in China, the UK or Sydney or Hong

Kong or New York. Why, because we have established our credentials in terms of knowledge, subject knowledge experts and developers of coaching knowledge and of course therefore if someone can cite the fact that they have been personally trained and certified and mentored by us then that looks favourably upon them. (Trainer)

People like certificates and companies like certificates. Is a certificate required for the industry? It's not required for the industry, but I think individual certification is helpful for the industry. So, yeah, I think, it doesn't make someone a great coach because they have one but I think it is helpful for the industry, it's helpful for perception, it's helpful for individuals who study like to have a certificate. (Trainer)

The executive coach education and training market has matured and consolidated over the past 20 years with the emergence of larger coach training firms such as The Institute of Executive Coaching (IEC), Hewsons Executive Coaching and College of Executive Coaching. These larger executive coach training firms have undertaken two significant strategies in their endeavours to protect their market share, one offering coaching services, the other creating proprietary training programs with their own certification. These strategies reflect those of the larger human resource groups that offer consulting services as well as proprietary training on instruments or tools as a means of protecting market share. Importantly, by creating their own proprietary training schemes and offering coaching services these training organisations are offering their graduates contractual coaching opportunities, but are also signalling to the market place the quality of their training program and graduates. The size of the national and global coach training and education market issuing certificates is unknown, however as noted above a gauge is Carr's (2004) report which indicates that in 2012 there were over 500 coaching organisations issuing credentials, and Scoular (2009) commenting in a Harvard Business Review report on coaching notes; "In the UK alone about 50 organisations issue certificates." (p. 96). This raises an interesting point that will be discussed later, on who controls standards and accreditation to practice - professional associations or dominant training organisations. This state of affairs can be best summed by the following quote.

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Well, there are training schools that give out credentials, there are now universities as well that give out credentials and so I would look at those, but there is a lot of, like, you and I could set up a couple of weekends or even a weekend coach training school and we could just, at the end of that give all the participants a credential. [laughing] And so, obviously, a universities credentials has a lot more rigor to it but a lot of the training schools, the rigor is not there. (Executive Coach)

As noted above, with the exception of the University of Sydney's Coaching Psychology Unit, all the major coach training organisations in Australia are now accredited to a professional coach association, mainly the ICF. This accreditation offers successful graduates the option to seek professional association credentials.

A final observation is that while coach education and training has matured, with the offering of formal university degree programs and approved vocational training programs under the Australian training framework, the government has not been engaged at any level in regulating the awarded credentials or certificates.

Summary

The coach educators and trainers have been the key actors in having the marketplace accept their coach qualifications and the credentialing standards of the associations. The coach programs all cover the identified core coaching skills and competencies. The major difference between the educators and trainers is that the educators argue that theory must be included in the curriculum whereas the trainers argue that theory is not required, only the practical application of coaching skills and models. The only exception is the claim by the specialist psychology educators for the inclusion of mental health within the curriculum.

While the professional associations have been successful in creating accreditation links with the majority of coach training organisations, they have not been able to stop these

coach training organisations competing directly against the professional associations by issuing their own credentials and qualifications.

The next section will examine the response by the executive coaches.

Executive Coaches

While I have previously argued that the professional associations are the public face of the coaching industry, the actual coaches are the practitioners, the people actually applying the skills on a daily basis and the individuals who will apply for credentials.

The interviewed executive coaches generally agreed that questioning, listening being self aware and being present, are the core skills of executive coaching. However, as noted earlier, the executive coaches did not indicate how they weighted the importance of these core skills, nor did they articulate what each skill term meant in relation to how they are uniquely used in their practice of executive coaching.

I think... if you're facilitating correctly, then that is a form of coaching. So I would use that questioning technique as part of my work. ...Perhaps even, to be honest, medical practitioners, the ones that pay attention to that kind of thing ...have good questioning techniques to understand and looking at a systemic view [of people]. (Executive Coach)

The above is an example of the challenge faced by executive coaching in their claim of exclusive use of these skills. In particular, with questioning initially being identified as part of facilitating correctly, the executive coach also recognises that questioning can, and is, used by other professions, such as a medical practitioners. So given that the executive coaches' core skills are shared by other occupations and professions, it raises the question, what is it that makes coaching a particular skill area and a profession?

I think probably the most important thing is being able to listen. That sounds like a simplistic thing to say, but I think really listening is the key to the whole complexity of communication. That really is important and it can take years, I've been trying to learn to listen for about forty years and I still

don't think I do it particularly well... I think having sufficient understanding of business pressures on people is really important. I think understanding something of the dynamics of leadership and particularly leadership in a team is important... But the piece of advice that I find I've given most to coaches or to trainees psychotherapists is to listen more and talk less. So I think there's a lot to do with listening. (Executive Coach)

For example, this executive coach with over 40 years experience was still unable to articulate what specific aspects of the listening skill are unique to executive coaching. He was able to draw out the complexity related to the core skills of communication, in particular listening in regard to talking. Interestingly, he includes the need to have an understanding of business pressures. This executive coach works exclusively with senior executives and is a psychologist, yet he raised understanding of business above understanding mental health, despite the claim by specialist psychologist professional associations for the inclusion of understanding mental health and referrals as an executive coach skill.

As indicated above, understanding business skills is a skill area highlighted by practicing executive coaches. As noted in Chapter 4, executive coaches perceive this as a critical element of being an executive coach, however, it is not listed as a key skill by other coaches or the non-business educators and trainers.

As raised in the introduction to this chapter, the identified coaching skills are all intangible. So while executive coaches were able to identify and label them, they were unable to drill down to the competencies that made up the skill in such a manner that would enable a trainer to develop a skills training program. Self-awareness offers a prime example of this.

This is a hot topic for me. I think that the first thing, first and foremost is to know yourself and have done work *on yourself* and to continue to get supervision and ongoing support, and whether that's peer support or through somebody else I'm not really fussed with. How do you continue to get clean on what you're bringing in to them because it's so co-creative, I'm bringing myself into it as well, I think that's really important is *knowing yourself*. So

if you want to call that a skills thing, it doesn't matter to me but that's probably the most important thing. ... So I don't know what that skill is, but just I guess having the knowledge to know what your boundaries are and to stay within those boundaries. (Executive Coach)

...self understanding and awareness of who I am, and so that I know what is going on within me, within the relationship. So, ... it surprises me every time I come upon the people in this particular field, ... that the people who work within these fields of human behaviour, who haven't even got their own shit together. [laughing] ... And then there are things like, effective listening and those sorts of things and questioning skills that are essential. (Executive Coach)

The interviewed executive coaches are all well regarded and considered subject matter experts within the field of coaching. However, being able to articulate the competencies related to being aware of your own limitations and current life circumstances and its impact on coaching performance, demonstrates a challenge of taking a skill, such as being self aware, and articulating what competencies make this a skill. Further to this, is the articulation of the coach being able to clearly identify the skills required, such as self-awareness, is identified as a “skills thing”. Reinforcement of this point is the comment of having one's “shit together”, while making sense in a discussion on self-awareness, would fail in any test for establishing a skills training program, especially one recognised by a national training authority.

Creativeness, including creative lateral thinking, was raised by a number of executive coaches as a required skill. It is surprising that it is not included in the professional associations' identified executive coaching's core skills. Additional comments on creativity included.

Executive coaching, ... has to start adapting and has to start thinking outside the square, using creative lateral thinking, especially in an environment which is fairly high pressured. (Executive Coach)

... but my whole program of having learned dentistry and studying and got my degree was about diagnosis, which you need as a coach, you need to diagnose the issue, even though someone might come to you with their problem, you kind of have to wade in and see what the big question is. ... I find the more I can follow procedure, the more flexible I can be in my coaching, as in with my dentistry, I follow procedure to make sure I am, if I am doing a filling, I am using the materials the right way, I get more creative not being able to “oh, how do I handle this material in that person’s mouth”. So, I have just switched context, a lot of the skills I picked up in dentistry, certainly have been absolutely useful in my coaching, certainly, except for anxiety, patients don’t like coming to the dentist [laughing].
(Executive Coach)

Importantly, all interviewed executive coaches came to coaching from another occupation or profession such as psychology, dentistry, accountancy, military or finance. This is a reflection of the infancy of the occupation of executive coaching. A major insight gained from interviews with the practicing executive coaches, is the emphasis they place on the tacit knowledge they bring from their past occupational knowledge and experiences. These executive coaches use their tacit knowledge, from whatever background, to make the claim that executive coaching is different from other forms of coaching, because they use the *tacit knowledge* they have gained. This is despite the application of generic coaching models. How this may differ in the future when new graduates enter coaching as a first, or primary occupation, is unknown.

I think what you do is you take into the coaching relationship the frameworks that you have and that’s where you learn to do that, so the experience makes for the coach. But then excessive experience may actually make for a laissez-faire attitude as well. Well once you’ve done something hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times, it’s useful because you get expert knowledge, so you become very good at pattern recognition and experts don’t need to have many points in the pattern to be able to recognise the overall structure, whether it’s knowledge structure, behavioural structure or whatever. And what happens then is that unless you have that personal

sense of being present and mindful in the conversation, its...you're working off surface markers of the conversation. (Executive Coach and Educator)

The above quote highlights the risk of complacency in using the same models over and over again, but also the need for a coach to use the models many times to gain that expert knowledge and identify the patterns that form tacit knowledge. This raises the omitted skill of pattern recognition and reinforces the importance of the core skill of “being present”.

Credentialing

While the interviewed executive coaches are early entrants to the occupation of executive coaching, they were clearly not early adopters of the professional association's credentialing system. It should also be noted that few of the interviewed executive coaches exclusively coached, as many executive coaches undertook other activities. This was discussed in Chapter 4, and will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

While not a representative sample of the executive coach population, the following is a summary of how the interviewed executive coaches viewed membership of a professional association and credentials. Of the 29 interviewed executive coaches, none had applied for any professional association credentials, for example the ICF. Though five were ICF members and one a WABC member at the time of the interview. These five indicated that they while they were ICF members, they did not actively participate in ICF activities, and the WABC member was not active, and relied on his accountant to renew all his professional association memberships. Nine coaches had completed IEC training and cited IEC qualifications during the interview, but these were not recognised at the time as being an ICF qualification. Interestingly one interviewed coach had held a senior role within ICF Australia and since standing down from that role is no longer an ICF member. This reflects previously cited research (ICF 2007) that indicates 75% of ICF members have not sought ICF credentials.

Professional associations need to have members wanting, and willing, to undertake credentialing as part of their membership. Yet, the majority of interviewed executive

coaches stated they had no desire to become a member of a professional coach association, or if they were, they had let their membership lapse.

Actually I have to say, I've let my ICF lapse now, ... Because I saw absolutely no benefit, I think it's a toothless tiger, the ICF. Sorry, I'm just going to be honest, I think it's a toothless tiger. I personally wasn't getting any benefit from it. I think having done the Sydney Uni course, to me that's far above anything that the ICF offers. (Executive Coach)

I've got an active role with the institute (IEC). I haven't too much time for the ICF because they're at this stage and I gave them this feedback quite recently, they've bundled all coaching together. I went to some of their meetings and just found that I was talking to life coaches. Well that's OK, what you talk about with them is OK but often they're not in the same space as me. They're not the same sort of people that I would mix with and want to have a peer, not competition, but I guess a peer review and also benchmark. (Executive Coach)

Obviously I haven't joined the ICF, I must be a maverick [laughter]. I stayed as a member of the CPA's all this time. I'm 55 next year and I can retire because I felt it added security and safety to what I did in my life. I became an accountant, even though I wasn't accounting because of the words my father rang through which was, 'you can always fall back on accounting, you can always fall back on it' [laughter]. So I stayed a member of the CPA because I felt it added credibility for others who came from that mindset that that's what I am. 'Oh he must be credible because he's got his CPA'. (Executive Coach)

What is important here is that the executive coaches saw more benefit from using their credentials from their past occupations or from the training organisation. This observation along with the gap between those that claim to be coaches and the membership base and the number of members not seeking credentials must remain a concern for the professional associations.

Summary

Executive coaches as the practitioners of the industry broadly agree on the core skills, however, they differ in their view on other peripheral skills required for executive coaching. Importantly, creativity and business knowledge are two skill areas identified by executive coaches that are not included as core skills.

Furthermore, as early entrants of executive coaching, all the interviewed executive coaches came from other occupations and professions and as such brought with them pre-existing skills and knowledge that they have tacitly included within their coaching practice. A challenge for any coach training developer is to exclude this prior knowledge in the identification of actual skills and the application of those skills within the context of executive coaching. This will be explored more in Chapters 6 and 7.

Finally, is the recognition that the majority of coaches have elected not to pursue the credentials offered by professional associations. Rather, they have remained with their education or training providers' credentials, or past occupation professional association credentials.

While there is a significant variation in standards and rigour of training and education, clients are the main driver on what skills and credentials they expect from the executive coaches they will employ.

Clients

Clients represent the market, the purchasers of the executive coaches' services. It is their purchasing power that influences coaches decisions about what level of skills, experiences, qualifications and credentials are required to practice. As identified previously, the interviewed clients represent the hirers of coaches for work in their organisation.

Representatives of the corporate clients interviewed noted that they use executive coaches as part of their human resource development strategy. The core competencies

listed by the professional associations has not, surprisingly, raised tensions between potential clients and professional associations. This is in light of the professional association's claim that *clients* lack an understanding of the core executive coaching skills.

Interviews with professional association representatives indicated that they believed that the clients, people who hired coaches for development work in organisations, identified executive coaching as, "not to be taken seriously". This claim by professional associations is not in dispute, as it is clear from interviewed clients and executive coaches that there are clients who have an apparent lack of understanding of the required core executive coaching skills. However, it is argued that the clients' focus is on outcomes and their hiring focus is not just limited to coaching skills.

I think you need to understand a little bit though about what makes people tick and why people do certain things or won't do certain things. I think as a coach you are going to hit barriers that people aren't going to want to do certain things. I think you therefore need to understand how to frame that, and what might be going on, and therefore to figure out how to help that person go about it in a different way. I think that kind of adds a level to [understanding], rather than 'I just ask questions and off we go'. (Client)

So, therefore the coaching intervention is only as good as the honesty, and the awareness of the individual. And also, I think it is a contact sport, I think the best *coach is somebody that can observe you in a real life situation* and then provide that feedback to you very directly openly and honestly. And I think that's the key to it. Because we are strange critters, people, we don't often see, see what other people are seeing. If we did we probably would have fixed it already. (Client)

Originally, we had a lot of discussion about which way to go and there were basically two options. One was to go with people that had a strong emphasis on the business experience around media or around leadership. Then there was another drive to go towards people that had a psychology background, in that they were more informed in behavioural change, therapeutic

intervention for media and also just to understand the concepts why people do and don't change. The decision was made to, as far as was feasible, get a combination of both and that resulted in, it wasn't so much that someone had to be a psychologist, that they had to have done some kind of study based on behavioural change which in most cases sat within psychology or behavioural sciences... So wherever possible it was about prior experience coaching linked to business drivers, as well as informed by behavioural sciences and some understanding of conceptual modelling. (Client)

These representatives raised an interesting problem; while the organisations *were* using executive coaching within the workplace and *did* claim to understand the key executive coaching skills, they wanted more than just these skills; they wanted the coaches to have and demonstrate business skills. They expressed the doubt that many *executive coaches* had these business skills. But clearly these clients wanted executive coaches to have these skills.

Absolutely. You have got to understand what sort of behaviour change you are trying to modify...For instance, banking is all about people but it still very highly technical, so you need to have some insight into that technicality to coach a productive outcome. There are some more life type skills that perhaps arguably are different to technical skills but I do think you need some knowledge of the processes. (Client)

Look in this environment and I don't know if it would be the same in others, but having that business insight, business understanding, is very important here. Also, I'm just thinking of all my coaches now, they have all had some exposure in professional services environments they have worked in those environments themselves. (Client)

Given the business context of all interviewed clients, the above argument for executive coaches to have business skills is not surprising. What is new to the coaching skills debate and takes it to another level is the case of understanding the technical nature of the business context, in the example above it is banking. That is, in addition to some form of basic business skills and knowledge, the executive coach should have technical

industry knowledge. This requirement by the client, that the coach has an understanding of the work involved, would appear to be in complete contradiction to the claims by the generalist professional associations, that it is not necessary to understand the tasks or technical nature of the coachee's work, rather coaches are experts in the process of coaching. However, and this point was raised in Chapter 4, where the specialist professional associations can demonstrate that the work executive coaches do, is applicable to the organisation, and from a business point of view, it is essential. This of course is in opposition to generalist associations, who claim that the executive coaches expertise is coaching, and not the technical industry knowledge. This is not to say that the specialist professional associations are against having a coaching qualification, but that they believe to be an executive coach requires more, in other words, knowledge that comes from being "a manager". Nevertheless, it does fit within this requirement from clients, to use executive coaches that have, or at least understand, knowledge that is applicable to the clients' situation.

Credentialing

The near silent voice in the discussion on the need or importance of credentials is the client. While the ICF proudly announced an alignment with IBM, none of the nine interviewed clients listed professional association credentials as a mandatory requirement for working as a coach within their organisation. Furthermore some interviewed clients identified the need for formal coaching qualifications and in some cases preferred tertiary qualifications as the *major* criterion for employment, though some clients were more interested in the coaches non-coaching qualifications and experience.

There's a couple of things that I specifically look for. I do look for a tertiary qualification in coaching, the particular course that you have completed. I do look for that qualification or some type of equivalent qualification. I look for somebody that can use a variety of psychological models and know how to integrate those into their coaching practice. Somebody that can assess the mental health and also have appropriate referrals in place and also somebody that is supervised and understands the importance of supervision. So that's really the criteria that I use there. (Client)

... looking for experience and perhaps training, but what have you done, what have people had to say about that, the whole selection process, so whatever qualifications, training and development experience. There is a whole checklist and often it will be a sense of where are their motives are what their experiences. (Client)

When we hire coaches for our business, what we're interested in is their tertiary qualification and their proven capacity working with corporate, don't care if they're a member of an industry body. (Client)

So I think we've professionalised everything else, needs minimum standards, expectations of what they're going to do for you and professional qualifications. ... you would need qualifications in something, whether it's a psychology degree or psychotherapy. I think all that fits into coaching, could be some sort of financial qualification like accountancy, chartered accountancy, understanding the balance sheets to whatever level. Then even Master of Business, business management, that sort of thing I think would be comfortable again to know that you've got someone that understands and can implement it. (Client)

One client related the experience of engaging a highly recommended executive coach without any formal qualifications and while the coach performed satisfactorily some of the senior executives being coached expressed concerns about the coach not having formal qualifications. So while the executive coach selection process placed some importance on coaching qualifications, other disciplinary qualifications appear to carry equal or greater weight along with experience.

The interviewed clients take the professional associations' argument that engaging a credentialed coach provides the client with an element of confidence compared to those without a qualification or certification as lip service. As stated earlier, clients favoured engaging those executive coaches with deep industry experience and industry contacts. These executive coaches are often seen as preferable to coaches without this experience.

This reinforces the argument that executive coaches need more than basic coach training

I'm not sure, to be honest. I'm not sure because I think if someone said, 'I've been through the ICF coaching' and part of that is they've got a slip of paper because they've sat through an hour seminar, then to me they haven't coached live... I'm really not sure about these remote learning. I think it's good to build the knowledge, I still think you need to develop your skills because it's an active pursuit. Like I can talk about swimming butterfly brilliantly, but if you saw me swim it, you'd see the complete difference between my intellectual appreciation of the stroke and my physical ability to, well ... drown [laughter] (Client)

This comment echoes the concerns of not just clients, but also coaches as to the rigour of training received. One of the arguments raised by a number of clients is that they questioned the quality of many of the distance education and training providers. The dominance of the University of Sydney's Coaching Psychology program is considered to have influenced some of the clients' thinking towards tertiary qualifications as compared to professional association credentials. However, all clients raised the need for more than coaching qualifications. This is contrary to the claims by the general professional associations that *their* qualification are all that is necessary, as the coach only has to be expert in the process of coaching.

Finally, the clients were ambivalent towards the need for formal licensing or registration to practice as a coach. None had given it any serious thought and even after some discussion on the matter none were not convinced that it was needed, nor would it change their selection process for engaging executive coaches. Interestingly one thought regulation would shut down the industry.

I don't really have a view on licensing to be honest. I probably had never thought it would go that far, to be honest. So yeah, not a thought, but for me it was more about understanding what the minimum standards are or what are the set requirements that are required. When you talk about licensing like doctors I probably had never thought that it would come to that formality. (Client)

Yeah, maybe that will work. The industry is probably too new, if they went down that path too hard and fast it would probably close it down before it even got off its feet. (Client)

Summary

Clients as the purchasers of the executive coaches' services unanimously agree that to be engaged as a coach requires more than the core basic coaching skills. While there was no agreement on these additional skills, understanding business and the context of the coaching engagement was critical.

Finally professional association credentials did not influence the client's executive coach selection decision. Academic qualifications in coaching and other disciplines together with evidence of executive coaching experience were considered more important than professional association credentials. This further reinforced the thoughts of practitioners that regulating executive coaching practice was not required.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the actions of coach professional associations in their endeavours to execute the concept of social closure and the responses to these actions by the other main actors within the emerging coaching industry, namely the educators and trainers, coaches and clients. It has looked at these endeavours within the framework of Greenwood et al's (2002) approach on stage 4, theorisation. It has examined how the professional associations of coaching have used, or not used, the elements of specification and justification, as part of their approach to organisations. As their role is to ensure executive coaching is considered part of the organisations' development plans for management.

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

The coach professional associations have clearly pursued a traditional path of social closure by identifying what they claim are the core coaching skills and competencies and then establishing credentials to certify that their members are duly qualified to practice as a coach. While the professional associations and executive coaches have unanimously agreed that the core executive coaching skills of questioning, listening, being present and self-awareness, the specialist professional associations and clients have argued that executive coaching is more than this, that executive coaches also need additional skills such as business, creativity, lateral thinking, human behaviour and understanding mental health, including the use of referral systems.

While coach trainers and educators did not disagree on the core coaching skills they differed on the need to include theory in their programs. This difference is clearly reflected in the range of cited training times from two days full time for basic certificate training to one year full time for a Master's qualification. However, all reputable training organisations recognised the need for practical coaching to be included in the training program. Furthermore, as the executive coach education and training organisations pre-date the professional associations they all have well-established proprietary training programs with their own self-accreditation systems. While the education and training organisations continue with their own accreditation system the majority have aligned themselves with at least one professional association through an accreditation process.

Therefore on paper, the professional associations have achieved a system of credentials that are recognised by the education and training industry as well as clients. However, the question remains whether this constitutes social closure within the meaning of Friedson (1986), Larson (1977), Macdonald (1995) and Murphy (1988). The answer would be “no, not yet”.

While coaching and in particular executive coaching, lays claim to core skill and competency areas noted above, it is clearly evident that these skills are shared by a wide range of existing occupations and professions, not least including those of health and personal development. Furthermore, there is no formal agreement across the main actor groups, especially the different coach professional associations and education and

training organisations, on the standards of skills practice for executive coaches. So while the professional associations have created credentials, they have not closed coaching off to other occupations.

Further weakening this claim for closure is the lack of support by coaches to seek membership and / or credentials from professional associations and clients to demand that the coaches they engage hold professional association credentials.

The move by universities to create graduate and postgraduate qualifications in executive coaching, supported by academic journals, would on the face of it appear to support Friedson's (1986) argument, that higher education, which is part of being a professional, presupposes a body of formal knowledge. However, the moves by universities would appear to follow Kieser's (1997) reflections on management fashions, whereby he notes "... university professors enter the discussion. They are welcomed in the arena because they provide legitimacy for the fashion even if they have no original serious research to contribute to the fashionable concept." (p. 63). This is not to say that the University of Sydney Coaching Psychology unit does this, certainly the university, and others reputable universities, do publish serious research on coaching. But it does indicate the belief, that by having a university "on side" can assist in creating an image of legitimacy.

Furthering this argument is the reality that neither the professional associations nor the educators and trainers can agree on the what theory and what level of that theory should be included in coach training programs and hence be examinable during a credential assessment process. The claimed theories by the universities are not exclusive to executive coaching, rather they are shared by many other disciplines such as psychology, human behaviour and sociology. As noted by Kilburg (1996) there is no empirical data to support the techniques and approaches claimed by executive coaches. This will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

Despite the fact that executive coaching cannot lay claim to a separate body of knowledge and the majority of practicing executive coaches have not elected to pursue industry credentials, it would appear that those practicing executive coaching as an

occupation have achieved sufficient critical mass to at least deserve continuing attention. The major indicator of its critical mass is the size of the coach education and training industry that has emerged over the past two decades and the acceptance by clients that executive coaches have specific capabilities or competencies to assist with the personal development of executives. An estimation of the size of the global coach education and training market can be gained from the size of the UK market, with 50 separate coach education and training organisations (Scoular, 2009) and estimates from Carr's (2004) research of globally over 500 in 2012. However, there remains no global standard of executive coach competence, education or training despite a call by Brotman et al (1998) for such standards.

The diverse and fragmented nature of executive coach certification by professional associations and education and training organisations has raised the question of whether the industry requires regulation. While this will be discussed in more detail in chapters 6 and 7, it is important to note that there are no independent bodies overseeing the certification and accreditation standards for executive coaches in Australia. Although the universities must submit their proposed executive coach programs to their internal course approval bodies, and registered training organisations apply to the relevant government body for the approval of vocational level training programs, these are not accrediting or certification bodies, they are merely vetting bodies to ensure the level of proposed education and training meets the minimum set Australian standards. So unlike recognised professions, there is no external body overseeing executive coach credentials, education or training standards, either in Australia or globally. Furthermore, the coaching industry has failed in its attempts for internal self-regulation with the collapse of the Global Coaching Convention in 2009.

Greenwood et al (2002) state that an occupation can achieve stage 4, theorization, by specification of general organisational failing, by justification as to why the abstract possible solutions are reasonable and gaining moral and/or pragmatic legitimacy. It would appear that executive coaching does manage to meet some of these criteria, but their claim on this seems dubious. For example, the claim by professional associations, general and specialist, that to be able to provide coaching, and in particular executive coaching, requires training in coaching. While this is acknowledged by executive

coaches, there is a “push back” by those coaches who believe that their particular qualifications, for example accounting, “out trump” the coaching qualifications on offer. Also, the associations, both general and specialist, insist that executive coaches should have the required qualifications, is accepted by some, but not all, clients. Nevertheless, client do accept that executive coaching is valuable to their organisation, as outlined in Chapter 4, but the need or necessity to have the required qualification is dubious.

Chapter 6 will examine the use of rhetoric and persuasion by executive coaches in their pursuit of achieving professional status.

Chapter 6

Professional Identity - Rhetoric and Persuasion

A profession can only be said to exist when there are bonds between the practitioners, and these bonds can take but one shape – that of formal association. (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1964, p.298)

Introduction

Rhetoric is the art of argument and discourse. Central to this art is the effective use of language, and how that language is used to communicate a message to intended audiences with the intent to persuade them to come to a conclusion. Greenwood et al (2002), in stage four of their framework termed the “theorization” of institutional change, examine the use of rhetoric in achieving change.

... at those moments, associations can legitimate change by hosting a process of discourse through which change is debated and endorsed: first by negotiating and managing debate within the profession; and, second, by reframing professional identities as they are presented to others outside the profession. This discourse enables professional identities to be reconstituted. (p. 59)

This chapter will examine the role of rhetoric and persuasion used by the professional associations, both general and specialist, in making the claim that coaching, and in particular executive coaching, is a profession. The chapter will also examine how clients, executive coaches and educators and trainers have responded to these claims. The first section will examine the approaches used by the professional associations to persuade the general public and the key actors of the occupation that it is a profession. Included in this approach is the use of codes of ethics, standards of conduct, journals and the media. The second section will examine how the various industry actors have

responded to this rhetoric and the persuasive actions of the professional associations. While the conclusions are that the many industry actors are yet to be persuaded that coaching is a profession, it is clear that coaching is now identified as a separate occupation and in some sectors as being “more professional” as opposed to being “a profession”.

Rhetoric and Persuasion

Becker (1971) notes that the term profession is an “honorific symbol in use in our society” and “that we should analyze the characteristics of that symbol” (p.93). Occupational members shape, through their rhetoric to others, their interpretation of what that symbol means. In this case the executive coach professional association members use rhetoric to convince others that executive coaching is a profession. Kleinman and Fine’s (1979) study explores how “organizational personnel” (p. 275) use rhetoric to change the focus of internal recruits. Their examination found that organisations attempted to,

...try to change the self so that all of the actor’s behaviors are affected -not just those under surveillance or located within the domain of the organization (p.277).

I would expand their argument to include an emerging professional association’s personnel as the equal to Kleinman and Fine’s (1979) “organisational personnel”. In this case the professional association’s personnel use rhetoric to change not only any new recruits to the occupation, but also convince other external groups such as potential clients, training and education bodies, regulators and existing other occupations of their presence and intent.

In Chapter 2, I included the following quote from McKenna’s (2006), where he looked at consulting as a profession. He notes how the consultants’ occupational leaders attempted to mimic the recognised and established professions as part of their strategy to be recognised as a profession;

...by assuming the outward appearance of a profession – including the rhetorical language, the career rewards, and the dignified style of client

interaction – even as they avoided the most confining elements of professional status like state regulation, individual accreditation, and, most remarkably, professional liability. (p. 248).

I would argue that executive coaching has also mimicked the established professions, but has moved a step further than consulting by introducing credentials as well as attempting to institutionalise their knowledge and practice in their efforts to establish executive coaching as a recognised profession. Yet, the professional associations of executive coaching do have one thing in common with the consultants, which is that they are not, for the most part, seeking state regulation. This issue will be looked at later in this chapter, as it is part of the rhetoric as to why they are not seeking state regulation.

Becker and Stern (1973) in their study on the professionalism and professionalization of human relations consulting operations noted the role of rhetoric and persuasion across what they summarised as the three major characteristics of a profession;

- (1) establishing training schools to *transmit* special theoretical and technical knowledge;
- (2) forming professional associations which *publish* journals and *facilitate communication* within the profession; and
- (3) developing a code of ethics and practices with *rules* for eliminating unqualified practitioners, *ensuring an orientation* toward serving clients, and reducing internal overt competition. (p.231-232 italics mine)

Larson (1977) introduces a further dimension of the use of rhetoric by professions in their endeavours to convince others they are not simply pursuing market control. What is evident is that the rhetoric used by the professional associations, general and specific, has evolved over time, but more importantly, it has changed depending on the audience.

Professionalization projects represent an external struggle by an emerging profession with existing occupations and professions as well as an internal struggle by those seeking to differentiate their specialist segment from others. This can be seen in both the generalist coaching and specialist executive coaching occupations. As identified above, rhetoric is central to the effectiveness of presenting the argument that the emerging

occupation should be recognised as a profession. As noted in Chapter 2, this supports Watson's (2008) argument on the establishment of "'internal' self-identities and the 'external' social-identities" (p.123), and supports Goffman (1990) position on what image does a profession want the public to perceive in terms of "who are we", and Ibarra (1999), who takes a future orientated perspective on the image the profession and ask about "who do we want to be" and equally, "who do we not want to be".

An emerging occupation requires its official representatives, namely the professional associations, to persuade all of the stakeholders that the occupation is not only relevant, but that it is considered legitimate in its claims to a professional status. Therefore the rhetoric of the occupational association occurs simultaneously at different levels within the occupation. For example, to the executive coaches and potential executive coaches, they want them to join the association by claiming that they are representative of the occupation. To the clients and the state, by showing that they are legitimate representatives of the occupation and furthermore, that they have a code of ethics. To the educators and trainers, they need to prove that the majority of the executive coaches belong to their associations, and so the level of education offered should match the criteria that are required by the association. And for the general public, the associations need to establish themselves as *the* authority on anything to do with executive coaching. Therefore, if potential stakeholders accept this message or see some benefit in joining with the occupational association's claims of being a profession, they in turn might engage in the same rhetoric, that is, that the occupation is a profession. In line with Becker and Stern's (1973) observation, the first form of rhetoric is to name the representative body a *professional association*.

There are four distinct levels at which a professional association, and then the occupational actors, engage in the rhetoric that they are a profession. The first two are at a strategic or macro level and these are:

- The professional association's rhetoric to the wider public and potential stakeholders to introduce and sell the benefits and needs of coaching.
- The professional association's rhetoric of governance, to their now established stakeholders, of the profession's effectiveness, efficacy and continuing value it

offers the community in general.

At an operational level, the practitioners, in this case executive coaches, and coach educators and researchers', rhetoric in support of the strategic message of the professional associations, and these are:

- The executive coach practitioner's rhetoric to potential clients, through the process of selling and marketing their services and delivering an expectation of standards and outcomes.
- The coach educators and researchers' rhetoric to the executive coach practitioners and wider public that there is a specific body of knowledge, and that the occupation has achieved acceptance within academia.

Rhetoric is used within the process of a professionalization project, which would include professional associations demonstrating the claim of how the occupation meets the array of professional 'traits' such as those found in the functionalist literature. The professional associations are seeking to display those attributes that traditional professions have, such as a specialist body of knowledge, credentials, qualifications, journals, codes of ethics or continuous professional development. While these trait or functionalist markers have been discredited by more recent sociological research, these critiques seem not to have disseminated to a wider audience, as the markers of a traditional profession are sought or claimed by occupations that are seeking to professionalize, and it is the traditional professions that newer occupations mark themselves against to achieve professionalization (see Bennett, 2006; and Grant, 2003) However, in the case of coaching in general and executive coaching in particular these markers are not certain or clear, as coaching shares its body of knowledge with a number of other occupations.

The following section will examine the use of rhetoric by the various coaching and executive coaching actors, in their efforts to mimic the established professions. Clearly, the intent of mimicking the traditional professions is to have executive coaching *recognised* as a profession, by the broader public and their peer occupations and professions.

I will be examining the use of language used by the various actors as in their attempts to create an image of a “profession” of coaching. I will further explore the effectiveness of these claims of being a profession through the responses of the intended audience.

I will also explore the actions of different coaching associations and organisations as they have attempted to differentiate themselves as a profession when compared to the broader coaching occupation. This is evidenced by the rise of re-branding “coaching” as “coaching psychology”. This has had an impact on the coaching community as well as clients, coaches, educators and trainers. A major external actor today, compared to historical periods when established professions such as medicine and law formed, is the popular media. I will examine how the coaching associations used the popular media in making their claim for coaching to be seen as profession.

The professional associations

The professional associations have been and continue to be the main voice presenting the claim that coaching and in particular executive coaching is a profession. The following section examines the rhetoric used by the professional associations and responses to this rhetoric from the other main actors within the occupation of coaching and how this is part of the macro elements mentioned above.

All professional coaching associations, both generalist and specialist, used the structure of *recognised and established* professions as a template on which to model their actions and their claims that coaching was a profession. As one member of the professional association - generalist indicated:

So we’re trying to map it out for different discussion, such as doctors, lawyers, financial people, different professions that require certification or credentials of some sort, so psychology of course and therapy, because that’s our map, it is all we have. So we see what was their path and we ask them “what did you learn” or “how did you get to this structure, what were the things that you had to go through to do that”, so we are going to be

doing a lot more of that. I'm certainly not one to blaze the trail if it's already there. (Professional Association - Generalist)

The above comment was echoed across all the interviewed professional association representatives, including the specialist psychology-based coach associations who had claimed that coaching as it stands was *not* a profession. However, both the generalist and specialist professional association, including psychology based associations, believed if they ticked the boxes of the template, that is establish a professional association, create certification and credentials, and in the case of the specialist psychology based associations establish a university degree, then coaching both generalist and executive would be recognised as a profession.

The following is the opening to a membership renewal letter received from the ICF in 2007;

Associations bind professions and professionals together; lawyers, psychologists, trainers, and coaches. The true professional is a member of his or her professional organization. By maintaining membership in ICF, coaches inform others that they are part of an influential voice that is shaping the future of coaching around the globe.

The letter clearly positions the ICF as the voice of coaching and also strongly suggests that if you wish to be a professional coach you needed to be a member of a professional organisation, in this case, the ICF.

However, while all the representatives of the different professional associations agreed that they were essentially using the same professionalization template, there was no agreement on what the term "profession" meant.

When one's lax with the meaning attached to language, particularly around the meaning attached to a language that describes the status and position of an industry, then we don't really know where we are. So if we're calling it a profession and it's not a profession, then really we're fooling ourselves and other people. (Professional Association - Specialist)

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On reflection this is not surprising. A follow up interview with a founding member of a generalist professional coach association on the topic of coaching being a profession highlights the emergent nature of this idea and importantly the lead role language, rhetoric and conversation had in the embryonic thinking of these early coach leaders

I mean, that was our thinking [responding to coaching becoming a profession]. Our thinking was, was this is something that is very important, and that it is something that we would like to do. ... And so, one of the reasons we emerged was because we realised that, hey, we are in this to create a conversation that is bigger than any one, you know, training style or philosophy or construct. You know, and so in doing that, we felt that it would not only create the conversation but it allowed for the evolution of coaching to occur in ways that it wouldn't otherwise. (Professional Association - Generalist)

The professional association leaders interviewed were clearly uncomfortable with my questions regarding their view of “what is a profession” and their view of why coaching was a profession. In one case I was asked, “if this is part of your research?” as they firmly believed coaching was a profession, and this fact should not be in question. The professional association members struggled to articulate specifically what they either thought or understood a profession to be, apart from listing some of the criteria mentioned above. Knowledge of the thinking behind “how” and “why” the early coaching professional associations evolved, provides an understanding of why many newer professional association members were uncomfortable with my questions. They had accepted the rhetoric that coaching was a profession; they were not part of the conversation.

The specialist psychology-based association representatives, though, had a clearer understanding, which is not surprising given that they were also members of the established Australian Psychology Association.

The following four quotes outline what the professional associations believe make up a profession.

You know, there are several well accepted definitions of what constitutes a profession and there is a lot of conversations that are occurring right now around how coaching is meshing with the definition. You know, one of the key parts of the definition of a profession as I understand it is that there is an *accepted body of knowledge*, there are *accepted competencies*, there is *accepted ethics of standards of practice* and things of that nature, and certainly we and coaching falls into all of those categories. So, as you would gather, the definition of profession being related to those *core elements coaching has it*. (Professional Association – Specialist – italics mine)

I think it is important to be recognised as a profession because there is an enormous amount of positive work that is being done worldwide by coaches. There are lots, and there is lots of research being done to substantiate the positive value of coaching. *And, being recognised as a profession makes it much easier to communicate with your marketplace about what it is that you are offering, what the value is*. (Professional Association – Generalist - italics mine)

Good question...I think it is a body of knowledge and skills that provide services to clients in the best interests of the clients and therefore has to be made available in the altruistic set of values which brings me to the discipline or self-control, control of the self in terms of putting the interests of the client before the interests of the self as a business person, and that differentiates from business. ... My understanding of professional is psychology based, rigorous knowledge base that is subject to peer review, but certainly peer review that is self-critical... And the purpose of the self-criticism is not just, it is not masochism, it is to enhance practice for the *sake of the client*. And their development or their enhancement and performance as with coaching, performance and outcomes, that is what I think about professionalism. (Professional Association – Specialist - italics mine)

So we are focussed constantly on creating a successful professional organisation for a very prestigious profession and that's our goal. ... So as long as we are a self-regulating profession that is we wouldn't be told how by the various figures or states and legal constraints that makes laws about those things. So we also feel that *profession is the highest possible status that we can achieve and be recognised*. (Professional Association – Generalist - italics mine)

The above highlights these differences, the interchange of profession, professionalism, and professional in response to the question on what is a profession. The first respondent recognizes that there are different definitions and interpretations being used within the coaching professional association. The second quote highlights the fact that coaching needs to be *seen* as a “profession” because that is how they can communicate with the audience and show the value of it. Therefore, professional associations believe being a profession is useful, because it can give the occupation greater credibility. The third quote highlights the “sake of the client” as being critical, so the occupation should be seen as being professional. The last, with the belief that providing positive work or outcomes means your work is a profession, to the other extreme that coaching will be seen as a “prestigious” profession. So what is clear is that different associations tend to mix up what is required to be a profession.

There are two major factors that have influenced the rhetoric of the professional associations. First, the different views held by professional association members on what “is a profession” has led to tensions within and across the different professional associations in their drive and claims about being recognised as a profession. These differences between the professional associations have led the various associations, around the world, to take different paths in their pursuit of achieving the status of coaching as a “profession”. They all recognise the templates of what a profession is, but they focus on different parts. Associated with this has been the creation of different generalist and specialist coaching professional associations, which adds to the rhetoric and claims and counterclaims for coaching and in particular executive coaching to be recognised as a profession, as outlined below.

The psychology-based associations have taken the path that a codified body of knowledge is what is necessary before a “profession” can be considered to exist. Psychologists are aware of how the failure to establish a clear and defined area of knowledge can impact on an occupation. They point to the demise of other areas of endeavour, in particular psychoanalysis, because of its inability to provide a precise definition of its concepts and research methods.

The lesson for coaching is that theory and research are required for it to grow and develop as a *robust, independent profession*. When a vigorous cycle of research, theory and practice is developed, each part of the cycle and the field as a whole benefits. (Stober and Parry, 2005, p.14 - italics mine)

Others, such as the ICF, have focused more on producing codes of conduct for coaches and their clients. However, they have also been interested in research, and how that will enhance the profession.

Second, is that despite differences in interpretation of what is a profession, the leaders of all of these associations clearly believe that coaching was either currently a profession or would in the near future be a profession.

Importantly, and as identified previously, one reason behind the claim for being recognised as a profession is the drive to attract new members and retain existing members. It has been shown that establishing a professional association is considered necessary to establish legitimacy and present the claims for the occupation to be a profession. However, professional associations should be aware that while they may present themselves as democratic, this may not be the case it is often the few who decide for the many (Michels, 1915). In this role they need to be certain that by creating a code of ethics or credentialing, for the “sake of the client”, they will not be perceived as undertaking actions that may harm the membership. For example, this could potentially occur if they adjust the membership, so that only those who are credentialed will be considered full members and everyone else as associative, as happened in the ICF. There must be, as Bucher and Strauss (1961) state, a “unity of interest”. However, most coaches do not appear to earn a majority of their income from executive coaching.

Of the executive coaches I interviewed, 14 gave their earnings from executive coaching as less than 20% of their income, 10 indicated that it would be 40 – 50% from executive coaching, leaving only 5 who indicated that they would derive 85% from executive coaching. One of the coaches said that,

People who are really successful as coaches [earning 100% of their income] have another income from a partner, [because otherwise] they're subcontracting to organisations and / or they're delivering workshops, group work seminars and not doing one-on-one work.

Therefore, the need to retain executive coaches as part of the membership is a key focus, for professional associations. The potential could be that if being a member of the association becomes too great or difficult to maintain, the executive coaches may find that they do not have a connection with the association, the executive coaches could leave to find either another association or, as in the case with the executive coaches interviewed, none.

State

As identified previously, the one missing actor from the coaching professional associations template was the *state*, even though many identified state regulated professions such as medicine, law and psychology as benchmark examples. The absence of the state and desire for self-regulation in coaching occupational rhetoric will be discussed in chapter 7.

Trust, Respect and Respectability

Trust, respect and respectability are key attributes of a profession and are exhibited by codes of conduct, standards, ethical guidelines and claims of exclusivity of knowledge. This refers to the second to the macro elements, gaining the respect of the client, community and the state. Respect, where the occupation is held in high regard, and respectability, where the occupation is considered suitable and its members can be trusted.

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Macdonald (1995) highlights the importance of trust within professions, as they are knowledge-based occupations. As knowledge-based occupations they provide services, and as such there are no physical goods to be examined. While it is possible for potential customers to check references for examples of previous work, ultimately they need to trust the professional delivering the service.

As there are no goods for inspection the customer has to trust the practitioner himself and trust is bestowed on those who appear respectable. ...if they seem respectable, they can attract business; if they are economically successful they can afford more of the outward signs of respectability. (p.188)

Furthermore, any occupation claiming to be a profession needs to establish and then maintain trust and respect within the broader society within which the profession wishes to offer its services. This relationship is paramount if it is to attract new members and also if it is to retain its preferred ideal of self-regulation. Self-regulation is the preference for professional associations such as the ICF, this is where the state does not involve itself in the administration of the profession, allowing the profession to determine issues such as codes of ethics and disciplinary matters.

The professional associations are well aware of how important gaining trust and respect are to market success as indicated by the following quotes.

Like all professions that have become successful, the coaching profession will experience success in direct proportion to the trust and respect we earn from the public we serve. In the eyes of the public, the media and regulatory bodies, we are often only as strong as our weakest link. Confusion and weakness directly translate into reduced demand for coaching, which is at the heart of why many of our members still struggle to make a viable living as a coach. Steve Mitten ICF President – *Coaching World Newsletter*, January 2005

I think if coaching becomes professionalized or it does become a profession, then it is much more around sort of trust and qualitative

measures that in turn will lead to healthy numbers. (Professional Association - Specialist)

But getting this trust is difficult, as elaborated by a client,

It is a bit like the boxing federations around the world really, you know, there is more acronyms in the world of boxing these days because if they don't like the rules of somebody else or something so they can create a new federation, and everything that goes with it. But, you know, I get that sense with coaching. I mean, I don't know, whether you know what boxing is like, but you know, there used to be a boxing, the WBA, the World Boxing Association, then somebody didn't like that so now there is the WBO and then there is an IBF and then there is an IBA and there is all, you know and now there is a million of them. Some of these coaching federations, and those sorts of bodies, what makes them a peak body? What's their criteria, and who appointed them? I think there is room for a peak body or a number of peak bodies but I would want to see, I would want to see what makes them a peak body. You know, because I could go and hang out a shingle and do that tomorrow. My own World Federation of Coaches, you know, so why have they got that right. So, I think there is room for that sort of stuff but I am very sceptical, I would want to see, you know, what sets them apart and why I should trust them. (Client)

Clients are not “buying” what is being sold by the professional associations. The clients, and this client in particular, are dubious about who appointed “this” professional association, what make them “a peak body”. This is reflected in his sceptical attitude – “why should I trust them”. This sceptical attitude is an area that the professional associations need to address if they are to see executive coaching as a profession.

Professional associations use rhetoric in many forms to build trust with their community, potential and existing clients and members. One of the more successful approaches is conferences and forums, by inviting clients, potential members and the

media to conferences, and using conferences to make announcements regarding research findings. Many professional association conferences also invite clients to present their experiences as case studies to provide a demonstration of the positive benefits of coaching. An example of this is from the APECS Bulletin.

We wanted to launch a different type of association for the coaching profession: one that recognised good practice and experience and campaigned for accreditation to reward the very best professionalism in executive coaching and coaching supervision. This was to be achieved by bringing top-level practitioners together and importantly being aligned to corporate needs and interests in the burgeoning coaching industry by *inviting corporate organisations* to join us and therefore benefit from, and contribute to, our endeavours. (APECS Bulletin – January 2008 italics mine)

The conferences I have investigated and attended all use a similar format and I would argue have a similar objective, to showcase the value of coaching by *informing and educating* coaches, clients and a potential new audience. Each professional association will typically hold a conference annually, and as such coaching as an occupation is gaining and strengthening its presence in the broader market place. However, I would argue that the different professional associations diminish the potential message on coaching as they put forward their own perspective, rather than putting executive coaching as the key message. Yet, this would require the professional associations to try to build a community of coaching that would result in an increase for all, in other words, they need to build acceptance together, not apart. Given what I have seen at the conferences, I do not believe that building the community of coaching would work, as different professional association appear to be reluctant to adopt this approach. I would add to this that the organisations sought by the professional associations to attend and present at these conferences are already using coaching, and therefore are not there to be convinced. Rather these client organisations are used by the coaching associations to persuade coaches, that coaching as an occupation is viable and relevant. That is, the conferences are used to build and retain trust with their members.

There have been a lot of stops and starts. ... and there have been a couple of times when we didn't think we were going to continue. So it feels really

good now, the health of the organisation is very evident now, we have worked really hard the past couple of years in particular, regaining the trust of the members. Because when there are stops and starts like that people start to lose interest. ... So some of the things that we are doing, ... we are starting to host our first... live event but it's a virtual event so it is going to be a, like a virtual symposium or e-symposium, ... and we are looking at really big names for that, so we are very excited about that. (Professional Association - Generalist)

Another element of building trust, especially with an audience who are unaware of your existence, is to ensure that the audience is presented with a consistent common language. As Bennett, Campone and Esgate (2006) argue “a common language is an integral part of the education process” (p.107) and, more importantly, that to achieve this “will require collaboration between and among key organisations in the field to do so” (p.108).

This consistent and common language needs to be presented at the macro or conference level, but then used by coaches in their daily practice. The ICF has been highly visible at the macro level, providing coaches with “a new way of languaging our profession” (Prior, 2003, p.2). Prior (2003) lists the areas where coaches need to ensure that the public understands coaching, as he states:

...the vast majority of the public is still unknowledgeable about what a coach actually **does**. More often than not, coaching is (incorrectly) understood by an unknowing public to be a *virtual version* of modern therapy; this misperception and comparison may be attributed to the public's face value recognition that regular, on-going meetings with a coach look like therapy “sessions” (p.1 emphasis and italics in original).

Prior (2003) also reinforces the ICFs' belief in the importance of the use of common language and message if coaching is to remain an independent self-regulated profession:

...the ICF believes that coaching needs to remain a self-regulated profession. To that end, it is **vital** that COACHES learn to communicate to their prospects, their clients, the public and the media in a language that

does not confuse our profession with other seemingly “like” professions (p. 2 emphasis in original).

However, as identified by Whitworth et al (1998), given the fragmented nature of coaching there are many *definitions* of coaching and hence many attractors for people to join the coaching industry. Each *definition* of what “coaching is” creates an interpretation of how coaching, or that type of coaching, will be judged. For example;

“[p]eople come to coaching for lots of reasons, but the bottom line is change”, Whitworth et al (1998, p. xix)

coaching is about “helping, collaborative and egalitarian rather than authoritarian relationship between coach and client” Grant (2004, p.2)

“one common aspect is the focus on improving performance” Bartlett (2007, p.91)

So while the professional associations have been actively engaged in using rhetoric through vehicles such as conferences, reports and industry wide conversations, the challenge has been and continues to be changing the behaviour of coaches to use that language.

Put it this way, coaching is more about a mutual conversation on adult principles and so on, and it is one thing to adopt the language it is another thing to practice it. (Professional Association - Specialist)

Part of this challenge is the actual language of coaching identified by the professional associations. Prior (2003) lists areas where the coach should use the language of coaching and includes what coaches should and should not say, for example; “identifying and reclassify coaching as a new profession”, “declare that coaching is not therapy”, “speak about coaching results as non-feeling based results”, “speak about your coaching business in terms of your business/clients/clientele – not your “coaching practice””, “use a “welcome packet” instead of intake packet”, “emphasise *client-initiated* action and accountability”, and finally, “talk about what you do and how you do it, while using terms associated with professional coaching language, instead of psychotherapy language” (pp. 2-4 italics in original). For the last of these he states that using coaching language will make coaching distinct from psychotherapy language.

Prior (2003) also states that while it is not possible to “claim ownership of language”, coaches should use verbs such as; “focus”, “prioritise” or “clarify” rather than “unearth”, “surface” or “alleviate”, which indicate a psychotherapy language. Also for content of coaching using language such as “results”, “projects”, “interpersonal communication skills” instead of “dysfunction”, “mood disorders” or “anxiety disorders”, again which indicate psychotherapy (p.4).

Nevertheless, it does not solve the issue that coaching and especially executive coaching faces with other occupations, in that it shares the same language. None of these suggested coaching words are different from the language that would be used in consulting or training. As such it is difficult to see *how* the use of the language proposed by the professional coach associations, in particular the ICF, would help to make the claim that coaching is a separate occupation and profession.

So while at the macro level, the professional associations’ consistent use of rhetoric, that coaching is a profession, would appear to have persuaded members that they are, but at the micro level, the occupation of coaching would appear to be struggling with this claim.

Dress Standards

Dress standards and the style of dress worn by executive coaches were not included in the interview protocol, however, as most of the interviews occurred during working hours I observed that the participants were conservatively and well dressed. Though in one instance it was raised by one of the executive coaches that she was casually dressed and not “dressed for the coaching side of the interview” as it was just before Christmas. However, she was aware of the importance of how executive coaches *should* present themselves to clients and made the point to me that this was *not* how she dressed for clients. As an observer, all executive coaches were well dressed and certainly not the type of dress which is often the case in life coaching.

“... you can coach while brewing tea in your kitchen, walking around the house or relaxing on your deck. You can coach on your favorite beach or

mountaintop. You can coach in cut-offs or sweats or, as one of my colleagues prefers, a faded pair of Batman pajamas”

(www.mentorcoach.com/coaching/sky.html accessed 5/06/09)

So while dress and image was not raised as a separate issue, it was on the minds of executive coaches and the professional associations, as evidenced by the Association for Coaching on their “How to Handle the Media” document. This document was “Undertaking a Television Interview with Confidence” and included the following:

Television is about impressions if you are on screen for a minute or two people will only remember the impression you left rather than your message. The impression you create is based on what you look like and how you conducted yourself.

What to wear?

- Men should wear a suitable suit, shirt and tie. ...Avoid white shirts as research has shown that a blue shirt with a red tie inspires confidence. If you do the interview standing button your jacket - it adds an air of authority.
- For women, a dress or skirt and blouse and or jacket comes across best. ... Avoid heavy jewellery - unless you're a fashion designer or jeweller! (Association for Coaching www.associationforcoaching.com accessed 23/09/2009)

The message from the Association for Coaching is that, because you will be creating an image, men should inspire by wearing a blue shirt with a red tie, and for women a skirt or blouse is better. The Coaching and Mentoring Network in the UK cites 2003 research by Tanja Schmidt from the Technical University in Berlin. This study, based in Germany, Switzerland and Austria set out to identify success factors in individual executive coaching. The Coaching and Mentoring Network note that Schmidt used statistical analysis that listed the most important factor for success as “qualification of the coach”, which includes personal credibility, education, professional background, experience and expertise as well as overall regard. They note as action steps for coaches:

The coach needs to be aware that everything he/she does (or does not do) contributes to the client's experience of the service. To strengthen the professionalism of the service coaches should ensure that all material (business cards, letterhead, flyers, brochures, WebPages) send a strong consistent message to their potential and current clients. This uniformity of message should also extend to the dress code of the coach and the way in which calls, emails etc from the client are handled. Once in a coaching relationship the professional approach needs to be maintained by the coach – consistently delivering on promises, following up sessions with records of the meeting, and being available for follow-ups between sessions. (<http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/resourcecentre/articles/ViewArticle.aspx?artId=98>)

Apart from language the professional associations are taking a stance on how executive coaches dressed themselves for interviews, though it is noted that the Association of Coaching does not expect women to wear trousers! While the above may seem basic, it clearly is *not* according to the Association of Coaching. The coach associations, both general and specific, have instructed coaches on how to use the media in getting the “coaching message” out into the media, though not all insist on the type of dress you are supposed to wear.

Code of Ethics

Greenwood et al's (2002) framework indicates that having a code of ethics is a way of “theorizing” the profession, and one element identified by the professional association leaders as being essential if coaching was to be recognised as a profession, was having a code of ethics. Alvesson (1993) suggests that a code of ethics should be seen as a “symbolic vehicle” (p. 999) that supports the political interests of the profession rather than a set of norms, such as altruism and rationality, which would normally safeguard moral behaviour. Thus a code of ethics symbolically promotes a perception that the profession has a process to ensure that the general public is able to trust and respect its members. The leaders of the professional associations communicate this code of ethics to its members, potential clients and the broader public.

All the professional associations/representatives interviewed listed having a code of ethics as an essential element of being a profession; it was interesting that a code of ethics was the *first* element raised, by all of the representatives, in discussing why coaching was a profession and how their association was professional. This was before any other criteria such as credentialing or competencies. A typical answer would be “You sign up for the code of ethics”. They believed that the code of ethics is essential to being a professional association and all of them believed that having a code of ethics was critical to achieving customer satisfaction.

It was clear that the professional associations believed that in joining an association their members would automatically sign up to the code of ethics. There was no discussion on what rhetoric they would need to undertake to ensure members lived up to the code of ethics. A further assumption by the professional association representatives was that members were aware of and agreed to a review process in the case of breaches of the code of ethics. The purpose of this has appeal to both clients and governments alike, as it indicates that the professional association is being responsible in its administration of coaches, and offers protection to clients and the broader public. This rhetoric is clearly part of the professional association’s risk mitigation strategies, especially in light of their argument for self-regulation. However, the professional associations do not represent the whole of the occupation. The ICF review process clearly states that if the coach is not a member of the ICF or an ICF credentialed coach, the ICF has no authority to pursue a complaint. It should be noted that from my interviews the introduction of disciplinary procedures is relatively new and untested in many coaching associations. All of the professional associations claimed to have a code of ethics, though the majority of them had not had reason to use them as a basis for disciplinary measures.

The only attempt to present a unified national face for coaching occurred in the United Kingdom in 2008, when representatives of four coaching bodies, the Association of Coaching, the Association of Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council UK and the International Coach Federation UK met at what is known as the UK Coaching Roundtable. The bodies agreed to

cooperate to enhance the reputation of the coaching industry and presented a statement of seven principles and shared professional values. Their statement noted:

In the emerging profession of coaching, we believe that:

- Every coach, whether charging fees for coaching provided to individuals or organisations or both, is best served by being a member of a professional body suiting his/her needs.
- Every coach needs to abide by a code of governing ethics and apply acknowledged standards to the performance of their coaching work.
- Every coach needs to invest in their ongoing continuing professional development to ensure the quality of their service and their level of skill is enhanced.
- Every coach has a duty of care to ensure the good reputation of our emerging profession.

However, it is noted that despite major media releases and promotion in the UK on the roundtable, there has been no follow up or action to enforce these values or principles by the four professional associations, nor has there been any attempt to replicate this roundtable in other regions. The professional associations have developed and presented codes of ethics, including the disciplinary procedures. However, they have no control over the use and ownership of the codes. Anyone can claim to use the code, and the associations have admitted they are powerless to act, in cases of breaches of the code, when coaches are not members of the association. The fact that professional associations, except of course the psychology-based associations, are having trouble to ensure that their codes of ethics and disciplinary procedures does create a problem when selling this to clients.

Coaching Standards

One area where the professional associations agreed, along with clients, educators and trainers and executive coaches was in the area of standards as a way to “sell” coaching to the clients, the state and the wider public. However, there was some disquiet among the various members of the coaching community.

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

In Australia, and particularly New South Wales, Dr Michael Cavanagh of the University of Sydney Coaching Psychology in 2009 initiated a working group to establish an Australian Standard for professional coaching. Standards Australia is a non-government organisation. However, by their launch, the concept of standards had been watered-down to guidelines, and the issue of a handbook.

The Standards Australia committee charged with developing the new set of guidelines comprises leading corporations, universities and groups from the human resources, education, psychology and adult learning fields.

Committee Chair Ann Whyte from the Australia Human Resources Institute welcomed the guidelines as an important step forward.

“The demand for coaching is growing exponentially but it has been an unregulated activity in need of better standards. Purchasers of coaching services want professional coaches.

“The guidelines enable coaches to plan their professional development in line with these demands and to coach within their areas of expertise,” Ms Whyte said.

Ms Whyte said while the professional associations who represent coaches have codes of ethics, many coaches are not members of professional associations and therefore are operating without a formal link to a code of ethics.

“These guidelines will provide added rigour to this emerging area of professional practice which continues to grow and become more embedded in corporate planning and strategy,” Ms Whyte said. (Standards Australia Media Release 29 April 2011)

The preface to the published Handbook of Coaching in Organizations (HB332-2011) presents the acceptance by the Australian coaching industry, as represented by leading coaching psychology educators, professional associations and clients, that coaching does not claim a distinct body of knowledge, which is a prerequisite for being a profession.

This Handbook presents guidelines for the practice of coaching in organizations. It has been conceived and developed at a time when the nature of professional practice is undergoing significant change. Unlike

other forms of education that seek to identify and claim a distinct body of professional knowledge as a base, coaching draws upon knowledge from multiple disciplines including psychology, business principles, education and the social sciences. ...

Coaching is a rapidly growing area of professional practice and this Handbook represents the input of a range of key stakeholders, e.g. purchasers, suppliers, professional associations, training organizations, researchers, universities and government, who have come together to pool their experiences. While it does provide guidelines, *the Handbook is written more as an aspirational document for an emerging discipline*. It does not seek to prescribe how coaching must be conducted. Rather, it seeks to capture emerging practices and processes that many (if not all) stakeholders will see as valuable. (Standards Australia HB332-2011, p. 2 italics mine)

As highlighted in the above preface, the committee participants in 2011 saw coaching as an emerging discipline. Importantly, representatives of the ICF and ICFA were on the committee despite the fact that the ICF globally through their website claim that coaching is a profession. The ICF notes on its website regarding ongoing governance and standards matters:

ICF is the leader in developing a definition and philosophy of coaching, as well as, establishing a set of ethical standards that ICF members pledge to uphold. ...

The ICF has also worked with other coaching organizations to develop Model Codes of Conduct—to be used in conjunction with the ICF Code of Ethics. This work establishes a set of guidelines whose goal is to establish a benchmark for ethics and good practice in coaching and mentoring. ...

The ICF takes a policy stand for professionalism and self-governance in coaching.

The standards and structures built by the ICF over the past decade, which support the emergence of coaching as a valued profession, also provide a solid-foundation for the self-governance of the profession. In addition, rigorous adherence as professionals to these standards and practices

provides the necessary assurance that the public is protected from potential harm. ICF's self-governance foundation is comprised of and depends upon each of the following standards and practices, supported by the efforts of the ICF Board, global representatives, credentialed, and member coaches.

(<http://www.coachfederation.org/about-icf/ethics/> viewed 2009)

Other international moves to address executive coaching standards include the Executive Coaching Forum in Boston, which has published a number of editions of the Executive Coaching Handbook: Principles and Guidelines for a Successful Coaching Partnership. They note in the introduction to the 2012 edition of the handbook:

Executive coaching continues to grow- in popularity and prestige. Yet there still is no widely agreed upon definition or set of professional standards.

Neither is there any agreed upon set of qualifications or training for executive coaches. This Handbook was conceived as a step in establishing guidelines by starting a dialogue in the field about what executive coaching is, when and how to use it effectively and ethically, and how to measure its efficacy. (p. 5)

The Management Standards Consultancy London, a private consulting firm, is developing an executive coaching standards of performance with the School of Coaching Milan.

The rhetoric is clearly still evolving, but what is clear is that different actors in different markets are working on their own agendas to deliver codes of ethics and standards, in spite of those being published by the major professional associations such as the ICF and EMCC. A consequence of these actions is that there is convergence in content and argument. The one missing actor to date in this discussion is the government and this will be explored further in Chapter 7.

Role of the Media in Promoting Coaching as a Profession

The role of the media, in particular the news media, is considered critical in developing and influencing public opinion. It is not the intent here to examine the debate on

whether the media reflects or creates social realities (see McQuail, 2005), rather it is acknowledging the influencing role the media has on their audience and the ability of an organisation to engage and influence the media to positively present the interests of that organisation.

Professional associations did not specifically discuss the use of media with me, but they were alluded to. As noted above by one of the early professional association founders, she recognised coaching was “a tool for transformation in our global world” and that they needed to create a conversation to sell that message. One of the professional associations’ initial actions was to include words such as “International”, “European”, “World” or “Global”. This was considered critical if coaching was to really be “a tool for transformation” and importantly in gaining media attention. These professional associations want to be seen as the “go to” organisations and people when the topic of coaching was discussed.

The professional associations also engaged external media and conference management organisations to manage not only their conferences but also provide “impression management” services through carefully managed media engagements. This is an important element of the “conversation” between the professional association and its members and also to other interested bodies such as the coach educators and trainers, potential clients, other occupational associations and the government. Furthermore, as each professional association conducted their own conference, they engaged the media in an effort to establish their legitimacy as a professional association, and assist the professional association in their quest for members and clients. The professional association leaders, in their media interviews and press releases, have made that claim to being that coaching is a profession. Importantly, the media does not appear to have questioned whether coaching is or is not a profession.

As coaching within organisations was becoming more prevalent, the popular media interest grew. The media wanted to discuss issues about coaching, what was it, who was it meant for, how much did it cost (Fox, 2002). Therefore, the media needed to have professional associations to talk to.

Those are conversations that occur every single day, you are absolutely right and one of the opportunities that I frequently get as the president of the [association] is working with various media sources and various entities on, how do you make sure that you are hiring a competent coach, all coaches are not created equal, coaches is a term that is used by lots of people and means lots of different things and so just walking consumers through some smart questions to ask that truly discern whether or not they are working with an individual that is going to be the best investment for them in a coaching relationship. (Professional Association - Generalist)

The professional associations, both generalist and specialist, were all very keen to be involved in my research, especially as they believed that *all* research on coaching would be of benefit. They saw the role of research as potentially very important to creating a difference between coaching and other occupations such as consulting. What was interesting was the ICF's approach to achieving this aim. They did not approach a major university, rather they commissioned a global consulting organisation PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to conduct global research. Their reasoning was clear, they needed to reinforce coaching as a profession, the professional associations as legitimate, coaching as something that should be taken seriously and more generally to educate a potential member and client base, and so they used a global consulting firm to achieve this aim.

In order for coaching to have the global impact and to actually be a tool that can resonate with people, and not be confused with other professions or things like that. You need to clearly educate the market basically all over the world on what *coaching is* and that someone who's had training and education around coaching...It's our job to educate the public and the best way to do that is the standards that are required for coaching as a profession, to be very, very clear. (Professional Association – Generalist – italics indicated on the audiotape)

While this section has explored the rhetoric from the perspective of the professional associations, is important to note that the educators, trainers and coaches have used media in different ways to promote the role of coaching and educate potential clients to the benefits of coaching. However, what is missing is any evidence of critical argument

or debate. These other coaching actors have supported the rhetoric through individual research, self-promotion and advertising and cross promotion through speaking at other occupations conferences. Examples of this include McKinsey reports (2012), Australian Institute of Human Resources magazine (2013), Australian Financial Review Boss magazine (2002) and Australian Institute of Company Directors magazine (2010).

Well, I mean, we saw a big burst of interest in coaching, you know, in the media and in terms of the number of people who would respond to ads, and you know, that kind of thing, in Australia, we saw that from sort of 2000 through to 2004, 2005 and all that, and then it has gradually decreased in some ways. (Trainer)

Though as noted above, the challenge for the professional associations and other actors is to ensure that the media presence is maintained and that the media accept the rhetoric of the professional associations. The use of formal journals will be explored in more detail later in this chapter; however, it is of interest to see how other actors now use media to further promote coaching. The rise of reality TV has not been lost on coaching. Reality shows are used in to suggest coaching as an activity that is useful for personal growth. In Australia, Dr. Anthony Grant, founder of the University of Sydney's Coaching Psychology unit promoted coaching psychology on a 2010 ABC TV reality series "Making Australia Happy" which he developed and was the lead presenter. Also in 2008 Professor Niki Ellis, an occupational physician, led an ABC TV reality series "Stress Buster" where she coached executives on stress management.

Summary

The section has explored how the professional associations have attempted to use rhetoric, to try to establish and maintain their claim that coaching is a profession. The rhetoric used has been supported at each stage of the professional associations' actions, to mimic the recognised and established professions such as medicine and law. They have engaged external organisations to sell their message that coaching has arrived and is the new "profession on the block".

How successful and persuasive this rhetoric has been will be explored in the next section, where I will examine the reactions of trainers and educators, coaches and clients and their use of rhetoric to support that of the professional associations.

Responses by Coaching's Other Actors and Their Rhetoric

The effectiveness of rhetoric can in part be measured by its acceptance by its intended audience. Greenwood et al (2002) are interested in how the professional associations justified the changes, which in my case would refer to how the professional associations attempted to justify the rhetoric they used. This in part reflects the acceptance or legitimacy of the organisation or entity presenting the rhetoric. Suchman (1995) presents a significant discussion on legitimacy, which he defines as:

a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. (p. 574).

He further notes that there are two important dimensions of legitimacy against which the effectiveness of entities' efforts can be measured:

the distinction between pursuing continuity and pursuing credibility and the distinction between seeking passive support and seeking active support. (p. 574).

Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) argue that organisations claim legitimacy to attract the resources they need for survival, which in the case of coaching is patronage from clients. They note that while this is problematic, it is important for organisations "espousing a moral mission or high levels of trust" (p. 191). This point is reinforced by Suchman (1995) in his claims that organisations seeking "protracted audience intervention (particularly against other entities with competing cadres)" will need active support from their members. Organisations that only need to achieve a low level of legitimation, have a "taken-for-grantedness" of their actions and claims (p.575).

The following will examine the effectiveness of the rhetoric through the responses and

actions of the coaching industry's other actors. I will discuss the overall effectiveness and legitimacy of the claims that coaching is a profession in Chapter 7.

The various professional coach associations, in pursuit of their objective to have coaching accepted as a profession, have mimicked established professions. However what is in question is whether they have gained the trust and credibility of coaches, clients, and the wider public. As noted by Suchman (1995) pursuing credibility is different from pursuing continuity.

Educators and Trainers

The educators and trainers, as noted in Chapter 5, have responded through the creation of an entire coach education and training industry. They have responded through their own rhetoric, creating their own credentials, conducting their own research, creating industry and peer reviewed academic journals and creating their own client base. This is part of the operational level, where educators and trainers are attempting to persuade the wider public that there is a specific body of knowledge, and that from the educators' perspective, it is accepted by the academics.

Both the educators and trainers support the argument that coaching and executive coaching either is, or should be, recognised as a profession. However, there was a definite difference of views on the qualifications required to be a coach, especially an executive coach and ownership of those qualifications. A further point of difference was predominantly with training organisations that have aligned their courses and qualifications to certification levels with a professional association and those organisations, predominantly universities, which have not sought professional association recognition.

The difference between the educators and trainers is based on how they view the occupation. These differences are captured by Layton (1971) in his discussion regarding scientists and technologists:

These differences are inherent in the ends pursued by the two communities: scientists seek *to know*, technologists *to do*. These values influence not only

the status of occupational specialists, but also the nature of the work done and the "language" in which that work is expressed. (Layton, 1971, p. 576 *italics mine*)

In the case of coaching, trainers are the technologists who want to know how "to do" coaching practice, whereas the educators are the scientists who "seek to know" the theories of coaching. As Layton points out, these differences are measured in degrees, of what each group considered to be the most important. This is reflected in the educators' rhetoric that university level courses and credentials are better than those issued by training organisations. In the case of executive coaching the weight is not just limited to the length of courses or course content but on the justification of the theory of coaching and supportive research. So in this case, educators are interested in providing research, as opposed to learning-by-doing, while the trainers, see research as of secondary importance.

I'm a bit bemused about how a body of knowledge emerges, because it seems to be fed by so many different fields. That's one thing. A growing recognition in the market place, in the community, about what it is and its viability, its credibility, and I think a growing intelligence about what it is, and what it isn't. I think in that, being able to accept, but not tolerate, the aberrations without questioning the overall value of them. I still think there's a bit about there, that it's still, any accusation of Mickey Mouse-ness or something is likely to call the whole thing into question. I mean that's the perception at the moment I reckon. (Trainer)

Well, I think, some of the university programs are definitely making great contributions to that. Now there are quite a few that are offering courses where you actually do read theory applied to coaching, and that's a big improvement. Some of the training organisations tend to be more, skills based, on the "how to's" but not necessarily grounding that in "the why". You know, why are you doing this that way and what's the guiding framework for that, but to be fair I think a lot of those practitioner organisations are starting to get there and a lot of coaches who have gone through some of those training organisations, we get a lot of them at [the

organisation] who say, I have done this or I have done that but what I really want is conceptual, why is it that works. So I think that's the development that continues to need to happen and, in some ways that's an academic model and so I think that is an educational model and some of the skill set training is training. Skills training as opposed to full on education where you are learning the underlying dynamics and theories involved too.

(Educator)

Larson (1979) argues that modern professionalization movements “attempt to gain social status through a kind of work that is represented as socially useful and benign, enlightened by adequate and adequately tested knowledge, disinterested, and respectable” (p.608). She continues by arguing that this modern movement has a dual aim of market control by translating scarce resources of created expertise through training and testing into market opportunities. Therefore it is not surprising to see the educators argue that they offer higher credentials and qualifications than their training counterparts as well as basing their education on a proven body of knowledge. In the case of coaching this required the creation of specialist academic journals on coaching as well as raising the profile of coaching in other related business and psychology academic journals. The academic database Summon cites over 600 published journal articles on executive, business or life coaching in 2011, compared to just 134 in 2001. This includes the launch of specialist coaching journals. It is interesting to note the inclusion of “international” in the majority of these new titles and the influence of psychology. These include:

- Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice;
- Coaching Psychologist;
- Coaching at Work;
- International Coaching Psychology Review;
- International Journal of Coaching in Organizations;
- International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring

The response, though, to the launch of specialist coaching academic journals and inclusion of coaching in other academic journals has not gained the industry-wide support expected by the coach educators and researchers.

You know it's hard because I tried to work out well what do you need to be a good coach, and so we read and read and read and as you've probably found yourself the literature is quite disappointing. There is a whole load of psychs writing and that journal, Psychology and Consulting, they've done a couple of issues it's all just psychologists saying this is our model for coaching and so yeah it was difficult. (Trainer)

I challenged the standard, as it was not a practitioner journal, [and] you have to have a PhD to get on the editorial board, and I said "this is a practitioner group who do you want to put having a PhD standard on this, and I don't agree with that". (Professional Association - Specialist)

The above sentiments were reflected by a number of trainers and interestingly, professional association leaders. They felt that the universities were taking control of the research agenda and journals to position the body of knowledge including associated skills, theories and standards firmly towards psychology. This is not surprising given that psychologists have a record of research and publication in academic journals and their attempts to regain control of coaching, in particular executive coaching. This belief that psychology *should be* at the forefront is reflected by Palmer and Cavanagh (2006) who state:

Coaching psychologists are at the forefront of developments in the coaching field. We now have many research and applied psychologists working in Australia, the UK, Europe and America, and benefiting both organisations and individuals who are purchasers or users of coaching. University psychology departments in Australia and the UK have set up units to focus specifically on coaching psychology and not just coaching.

But what do coaching psychologists bring to the burgeoning field of coaching? We bring more than just a framework for a conversation with a client, such as the famous GROW model. We bring a host of psychological theories and models that underpin, and bring depth to, the coaching relationship. These include an understanding of mental health; motivation; systems theory; personal and organisational growth; adaptation of

therapeutic models to the field of coaching; research into effectiveness, resilience and positive psychology. (p.1)

An important outcome of the rise of coaching, in particular executive coaching, has been the response of psychologists, which has seen a shift in labelling from executive coaching to coaching psychology. This shift has had a mixed response from clients, as many of them did not see the importance of having psychology-trained coaches.

“I don’t think having a psychologically trained coach is essential, sometimes it could be worse!” (Client)

The above sentiment was reflected in interviews and discussions with clients from around Australia and other countries. Despite clients listing psychology-trained coaches as being of low importance, there has been a notable shift to the use of the term coaching psychology rather than executive coaching. While this was initially evident in the Sydney market and considered to be a reflection of the influence of the University of Sydney’s Coaching Psychology program, its use is now more widely accepted. This is evidenced by the publications that use the term coaching psychology, so that it has become part of the coaching lexicon. So psychologists have made an impact over and above the general professional associations’ claims that psychology is not required.

However, the coaching psychologists appear to be challenged by the use of the term “coaching psychology” by executive coaches who are not psychologists (personal discussions with Dr. Cavanagh). I undertook a review of six of the websites where executive coaching graduates of the University of Sydney’s Coaching Psychology program indicates the majority have included “coaching psychology” in their degree title; Master of HRM and Coaching Psychology instead of Master of HRM and Coaching, which is the degree awarded. Three of the websites claimed in either their CV or website to be trained in coaching psychology.

[Name] has a Masters degree in HR and Coaching Psychology, postgraduate qualifications in education and management and is an accredited workplace trainer and assessor.

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[Name] has a Masters of HRM & Coaching Psychology from the University of Sydney

[Name] has over XX years of practical, commercial management and leadership experience with business-school learning and a Masters in Coaching Psychology and Human Resource Management

While this is a small sample, it does indicate that not only is the term “coaching psychology” being used, but, in these cases, it is being used inappropriately.

At an international level coaching psychology has also risen in prominence, especially in the UK where the Society for Coaching Psychology changed its name in 2011 to the International Society for Coaching Psychology. It is noted though, that only qualified psychologists can attain membership of this organisation. However, this has not stopped executive coaches with any exposure to coaching psychology in their training to include the words “coaching psychology” in their CV. Interviews with executive coaches with a psychology background expressed their concern at this move as they believed being a psychologist gave them a greater “sellable” case to potential clients.

Associated with the rise in coaching journals and academic articles is the growth in doctorates in coaching. Again from Summon, in 2011 there were 45 listed dissertations with “executive coaching” in either the title or abstract compared to 6 in 2001. A review of the abstracts indicates that all presented a positive picture of “executive coaching”.

However, not all are supportive of this growth in research and academic publications. In the eyes of at least one trainer the push by psychology and in particular evidence based coaching is seen as a double edged sword. In their view while it has the possibility of creating coaching as a specialty area it is seen as shutting others out of coaching.

...the potential downside for coaching is, in its effort to grow up, if you will, or formalise itself and mature as a profession, it might lose some of it's cutting edge and unique characteristic and the answers to that is... the dangers of specialisation and this sort of rush to evidence based practice.

(Trainer)

The above reflects one of the significant points of difference between trainers and educators. The view from most of the trainers interviewed was that they wanted executive coach training to remain more practical rather than theoretical and this is reflected in their training programs, marketing material and client engagement. While the training organisations do not want to have their material scrutinised from a theoretical basis by a university, the majority have sought recognition from a professional association. However, while the trainers recognised that having their training accredited by an association was of benefit, especially from a marketing perspective, they did indicate some scepticism of the value of the professional associations.

What I think the last count was about 30 different associations and as you know, none of them have any legitimacy or any recognition by any government anywhere throughout the world and none of them are certainly representational of the professionals that we work with and in fact probably less than 5% of the individuals that would really find any value of joining these so called, self labelled, associations. None of them are really recognised by industry and that is the bottom line. (Trainer)

Further evidence of the differences and fragmentation within coaching can be seen through the creation of the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching (GSAEC). The GSAEC was formed in America in 2004. It was established by Dr. Stephen Brock from Kennesaw State University, Dr. Ray Forbes and Dr. John Brent from Franklin University, who believed, “at that time, no academically-based education programs existed for coaching. The three agreed that coaching needs to become a profession, and they recognized that a profession has, by definition, an academic grounding.” (GSAEC website 2012) Unfortunately the GSAEC failed to recognise the established university coaching programs in Australia and the UK even though they had these universities on their list.

In 2012 the GSAEC lists 37 professional and academic societies and networks for executive coaching and these range across the Academy of Management, Academy of Organizational Occupational Psychiatry, Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder

Coaches Organization and Strategy for Coaches a coaching community based web site with no affiliation with any professional association. The GSAEC openly promotes graduate level coach education standards through a bi-monthly webinar conversation, further excluding practitioner training organisations.

So while the rhetoric presented through research and academic journals is seen by some to add validity to claims that coaching has “grown up” to become a profession, others, in particular trainers, are yet to be convinced of this need or its value. For executive coaches and clients, journals, either academic or practitioner, are not a high priority or concern. They were acknowledged, during my interviews, but not viewed as a primary source of keeping up with the latest thinking or research within coaching. So the rhetoric and positioning by coaching academics in particular has not gained industry wide acceptance, rather it is argued, the journals have created a niche vehicle for coaching academics to justify their claims for academic recognition. This was reflected by the non-academic coaches who had been rejected by academic peer reviewed journals, a common criticism that editorial staff are able to control published journal content and exclude others that they deem to not meet their standards.

Executive Coaches and Clients

The executive coaches also introduce rhetoric as part of selling their services to clients. Part of this approach has been to “sell” to clients the ability of executive coaches to prove that the work they do is covered by the codes of ethics. The response to the codes of conduct, introduced by the professional associations to promote ethical conduct and enforce standards, appears to have had little impact on clients. One reason for this is the misunderstanding or interpretation of the concept of “profession” across the coaches and clients and so the need for codes and standards. Professional associations have used ethics as a selling point, for both executive coaches and clients. It would appear that executive coaches are accepting and using this approach to ethics, but professional associations have failed to ensure that their audience, the clients, felt the same. However, executive coaches, regardless as to whether they believe coaching is considered a profession, have used the codes as part of their message.

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I'm not quite sure whether we are talking about a profession or an industry body, so I guess it really does depend on your definition of what a profession is. Because I don't know whether coaching is mature enough to be put under the title of profession. I think there are certainly professional coaches out there... I guess a profession has some level of rigor around its practices and ethics and standards that doesn't actually exist really in the coaching world at this point in time. (Executive Coach)

Organisations that are a professional body that individuals within that profession can go to for support without feeling as if it is a commercialised site. I think that's really important. If you look at the CPA and things like that, there is a commercial side to it but there is also a non-commercial support for its members. And I think there is a transparency in many of the organisations that we see that doesn't yet exist in many coaching organisations. (Executive Coach)

No not at all, I don't think industry associations have any kind of power for recourse. So if I had a problem with coaching, I went to the industry body, what are they going to do for me, nothing. Unless the people in the industry really buy into it, and get behind it and support it. They can, over time, work but if you look at other industries with strong industry bodies where there's a lot of money and finance and they get in behind it, they're still fairly weak. (Client)

What's the basic entry criteria to become a member, how do you get kicked out? I have seen all these bodies where anybody can join but nobody ever gets kicked out. If it is truly a profession then you have got to have some form of moderation. This is important because if somebody steps outside the rules, there needs to be consequences. So, part of it is a fraternity but part of it is a broader consequence for inappropriate actions. So, what I see in a lot of those bodies around the world not just coaching, people are hanging out shingles. It's all about the power rather than necessarily about

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giving back and I think, you know, when you see strong professional bodies, with strong track records, and a strong set of consequences. (Client)

The client's sentiments reflect the degree of cynicism towards the professional associations and their claims regarding codes of conduct and standards. In the case of some clients, they went a step further as they developed their own coaching standards and expectations.

So in one interview in Melbourne, someone had been involved in supposedly setting up coaching for a bank but when he was asked what models he used and described Covey's Seven Habits for Highly Successful People, that wasn't considered rigorous in the context of what standards we were trying to evolve. To do that, we had packs of coachees about what they would expect and what coaching was and we also had similar packs for coaches, so that it was really clear about the expectation and everyone had to sign off and there was a clear understanding that it was about change link to specific deliverable. (Client)

Interestingly, additional feedback from discussions with senior executives from organisations who regularly engage executive coaches is that they have moved in a similar direction to that expressed above. So the response from the clients to the coaches and professional associations is that they have established their own codes and standards.

In talking to a lot of the organisations that we're talking to, a few at the moment who ascertain that sort of executive level, like who we might use and that sort of stuff and companies that I've spoken to. For them, making sure they have robust developments for their coaches and standards for their coaches is very important. (Client)

If it [executive coaching] were to become a profession? Personally I just think there would be advantages. I just think it would help define what the minimum standard is that people have to meet, provided that the standard is not too low and I think that's a challenge and anybody can get in. If you try

and make it too low, to try and cater for the broader, then you're kind of not really helping yourself at the end of the day. But yeah, personally I think it would add rather than detract. (Client)

However, the clients are anticipating that if executive coaching is to be recognised as a profession there needs to be an industry wide accepted code of ethics and standards.

So there is a lot of different activity in this area but it is all quite disparate in that the different persons aren't talking to each other, and I think that, you know, in a lot of these ethical codes and competencies frameworks, there is probably a huge amount of overlap but the industry is probably looking to the wider sector and provide a separate market, the industry probably perceive them as separate and competing frameworks rather than being in line with each other I think. (Executive Coach/Educator)

The opportunity for coaching, in particular executive coaching, to align codes of ethics and standards is clearly there, however, the only attempt to bring all coaching stakeholders together, the Global Coaching Convention (GCC) 2007-2008, failed to meet expectations with the withdrawal of major professional associations and a watering down of the final declaration. The GCC attempted follow up conventions, with the Rainbow GCC announced for Cape Town in 2010, but this was deferred to 2011 and by all accounts did not eventuate as a major event.

The response and actions by some executive coaches and educators since 2008 reflects the fragmented nature of coaching and executive coaching, but also the common themes and intentions appearing across these fragmented groups. Part of this fragmentation is that while practicing executive coaches are interested in becoming a profession *if* it helps them sell their services, otherwise they do not appear to be particularly interested.

Conclusion

Rhetoric plays a critical role in an occupation's claim for professionalization and the creation of relevancy and legitimacy. It is suggested that rhetoric needs to be explored at

four distinct levels, two at the strategic level represented by the rhetoric and actions of the occupational associations and two at the operational level, that of the practitioners.

In the case of coaching, the early occupation leaders deliberately followed the established profession template commencing with creating professional associations, and incorporated terms such as “international” and ‘world” within their professional association titles. Their early rhetoric included the claim that coaching was a profession. Their actions and rhetoric proceeded to deliver the expected symbols of established professions, namely codes of ethics, standards, research and credentials all underpinned by the constant language that coaching is a profession.

However, the interview process identified that while the professional association leaders continued the mantra that coaching was a profession, there was no agreement by the interviewed professional association representatives on what they understood the concept of profession to mean, apart from having the symbols of a profession.

As the promotion of coaching and in particular executive coaching increased, the demand for coaches also increased, however, the professional associations have not been able to control those who call themselves a coach, and coach practitioners have not seen the need to join the professional associations. On this basis the rhetoric of the professional associations to convince the wider public and key stakeholders that coaching is legitimate and relevant has been successful.

However, the ongoing, and strategic rhetoric of governance has meant the professional associations have been less successful as the different actors have implemented their own codes of conduct, standards, research and credentials, albeit with convergence in outcomes. The major attempt at establishing a global agreement on coaching standards, the Global Convention on Coaching has failed.

At the operational level, the key actors, namely the executive coaches, clients, educators and trainers have responded in different ways, though, with the exception of the release of the recent Handbook of Coaching by Standards Australia, a non-government

organisation, where executive coaching is identified as an emerging discipline, all agree that executive coaching either is or has the capability to be a profession.

In response to the professional associations' published codes of ethics and standards, the larger organisational clients have clearly developed and implemented their own internal standards and codes of conduct, whereas at the individual client level, coach practitioners are happy to cite the ICF code of ethics even if the coach is not a member.

In response to the need for research and validation for a unique body of knowledge, the academic educators have responded with the creation of a number of journals and research programs to demonstrate the underpinning theory of coaching and related body of knowledge in addition to the effectiveness and positive benefits of coaching. It is noted though that psychologists dominate the academic research into coaching and journal editorial. This has created friction with practitioner level trainers, who do not see the need for this level of research and journals.

From the above it is clear that the rhetoric of professionalization has had some success with coaching, and in particular executive coaching, gaining momentum as a legitimate and now established occupation. The deliberate actions and rhetoric of the professional associations to mimic the appearance of established professions has in part succeeded as they have established the required professional symbols such as codes of ethics, standards, journals and credentialing systems. However, the response by the main actors does not align with the template of established professions.

However, it is clear that executive coaching is not yet considered a profession as there is a gap across all the main actors in their interpretation of what is a profession and their ability to unify their existing fragmented views. As highlighted throughout this thesis, the missing actor is the government, and this is an actor most of the professional associations wish to remain silent as they seek self-regulation, though this does not include psychology-based associations who are interested.

Chapter 7 will provide an examination of the issues raised in Chapter 4, 5, and 6 as well as the implications for executive coaching.

Chapter 7

Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings arising from the themes and data presented in Chapters 4 – 6. The findings of the research were related to three different aspects of professionalization: boundary work, certification and rhetoric. What is presented here is a reflection on the literature and empirical data, as well as critically understanding the findings. Greenwood et al (2002) offer an analytical framework that helps us explain how professional associations of coaching are attempting to make the changes they feel are necessary to achieve, what they believe, is professional status.

This study uses Greenwood et al's (2002) change framework by examining the impact the executive coaching professional association's strategy to be recognised as a profession. By using this framework I have explored the questions of:

- Why do some members of emerging knowledge intensive occupations, such as executive coaching, want to have the occupation recognised as a profession?
- Compared with traditional occupations that are commonly considered to be professions, what are the deliberate actions and strategies, both actual and rhetorical, that emerging occupations have used in their attempts to be considered professions, and what have they omitted and why?
- How can we explain the success or otherwise of emerging occupations in their quest for professional status?

Answering these questions will allow us to understand the following:

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- what the executive coach associations have established and developed;
- what the executive coach associations have partially established and developed, and;
- what the executive coach associations have not established and developed.

Emergence or Happenstance

A question that can be raised in the context of Greenwood et al's (2002) institutional change model is whether the observed changes conformed to the staged pattern outlined in their framework, or were merely coincidental happenstance. This raises the further question of whether executive coaching developed from a planned change process internal to the occupation, or evolved in an unplanned or contingent manner. For example, if the influential consulting organisation McKinsey and Company had not published the article "The War for Talent" (based on its own research), with other consulting firms joining in to push the need for talent development and retention, would executive coaching have developed as quickly as it did, or followed the paths that it took? This question with regard to institutional change, planned emergence or happenstance, while unaddressed here, remains a fruitful area for future research in other occupational contexts. Unquestionably, however, executive coaching *has* emerged as a new occupation and the early leaders have taken a planned change approach in their bid to be recognised as a profession. The result has seen senior executives, consultants and psychologists re-badge their activities to now be considered as executive coaches.

A challenge, when examining emerging occupations attempting to claim professional status within the framework of institutional change, is to form a construct of the occupational entity seeking professional status. Conrad and Haynes (2001 p. 47) note that a construct is "a symbolic creation that enacts the worldview(s) of a language community. As such, constructs are the products of rhetorical processes through which groups of social actors – including groups of scholars - attribute meanings to action".

As noted in chapter 1, executive coaches and executive coaching has been constructed through several processes: of people practicing the skills and models now seen as coaching; book publications - by people who are considered to be "gurus" of coaching; establishing training courses; setting up of professional associations; and finally, universities creating courses and journals that legitimate coaching and executive

coaching and enhance their respectability. All of these came together to create a “perfect storm” where clients, having downsized and outsourced much of their training and development needs, have “bought” the services of executive coaches. Clients believed that executive coaching added value to their operations, by offering executive staff the opportunity to have one-to-one development, and helping to retain talented staff.

However, Abbott (1991a) states that for an occupation to be considered a profession, there needs to be cohesion at the individual and structural levels of the occupation. Each is necessary and neither is sufficient to create occupational solidarity. These conditions do not appear to be met for executive coaching, as there is too much discrepancy in the beliefs and objectives between coaching practitioners, professional associations, educators and trainers. This will be demonstrated in the following sections.

This chapter discusses the change process undertaken by leaders and adopters of executive coaching in their attempt to ensure the emergence of executive coaching as an occupation and subsequently as a profession. In doing so this discussion endeavours to draw out the interpretations and meanings of this process for future emerging occupations. It is also important for existing professions to identify the strategies and processes that may be used by these emerging occupations as they endeavour to encroach on the boundaries of their professional jurisdiction. In the case of executive coaching this is represented by the failure of licensed psychologists to understand and appreciate how executive coaching in particular could encroach on their occupational territory. By examining these issues, answers can be provided to the research questions raised in Chapter 1 and as outlined above.

This chapter is structured as follows. The first section will examine why executive coaching leaders wanted their occupation to become a profession, and why the professional associations were interested in establishing a profession. To understand why this occurred, I will examine the issues raised by the concept of boundary setting. The second section will examine the deliberate actions and strategies pursued in the attempt to make executive coaching a profession. The third section will examine the success or otherwise of executive coaching in this undertaking. The last section will

outline future research and limitations of my study. It will also examine the role of emerging occupations in their attempt to achieve professionalization.

Becoming a Profession?

This first section will examine the initial question - why do some members of emerging knowledge intensive occupations, such as executive coaching, want to have the occupation recognised as a profession?

As indicated in Chapter 1, executive coaching arose as an unintended consequence of initiatives such as downsizing, de-layering and outsourcing from organisations.

Managers, be they human resource or line, realised the need to keep their talented people and to provide talent management resources for them. The word “coach” was familiar to managers, mostly because it came from sport, and so from this came the emergence of *executive coaching* and therefore executive coaches. However, if executive coaches, the professional associations and trainers and educators wanted to create a profession rather than just an unregulated occupation, then they needed to establish boundaries and social closure in the form of credentialing.

Boundaries

Why do some members of emerging knowledge intensive occupations, such as executive coaching, want to have the occupation recognised as a profession? A glib answer would be that they want to be a profession in order to charge more money to the clients. However, the answer is subtler, it is about boundaries around and within the occupation and by doing so laying claim to the jurisdiction around coaching, especially executive coaching. Why did they create boundaries, what was their purpose? Executive coaches and their professional associations wanted to establish, what Abbott (1988) calls, “jurisdiction” around the area of coaching. As we shall see, the problem they faced was that coaching, or executive coaching, was not recognised as a separate entity, there were no boundaries. Therefore, both the executive coaches and their professional associations needed to *create* these boundaries. How successful they have been in creating these boundaries will be looked at further in the chapter, but for now the answer is, dubious.

In the case of executive coaching, Greenwood et al's (2002) framework would suggest that in stage 3, pre-institutionalization, the leaders of the professional associations for executive coaching, attempt to show that the occupation has viable solutions to particular organizational problems. At stage 4, theorization, we would expect the professional associations of executive coaching to try to theorize their solutions, to encourage their wider adoption. In doing this, professional associations, educators and trainers, and the coaches themselves are attempting to create boundaries around their work.

Abbott (1988) states that to establish a boundary requires members of the occupation to ensure that no other occupation can claim to undertake the same area of work. As Macdonald (1995) argues, to be a "distinct occupation" requires the occupation to create a boundary around what "they do" and what "others do". Abbott (1988) also states that *intra-occupational* disputes can occur. Executive coaches and their professional associations therefore challenged the life or business coaches that encroached on what they saw as their area of expertise.

First, with regard to creating boundaries from "other" occupations, it is difficult to distinguish between coaching and other types of work, such as consulting, as there is little empirical evidence to support this claim of differentiation. Nevertheless, as indicated in Chapter 4, there is a substantial body of writing from within the coaching fraternity that considers coaching and executive coaching, as distinct occupations.

Executive coaches indicated that they struggled to differentiate themselves from consultants, and a majority of those executive coaches interviewed, indicated that they continued to offer consulting services. This raises a challenge for clients, as it is unclear how they might distinguish between executive coaching and consulting when these services are offered by the same individuals. While occupational leaders argued that executive coaching's focus should solely be on talent development, the reality is that both executive coaches and consultants offer services related to talent development, strategy implementation and organisational change. The interviews revealed that executive coaches will present themselves as either coach or consultant, dependent on whichever value proposition, or label, enables them to successfully sell their services.

This lack of definition around executive coaching continues to pose a problem for professional associations. The professional associations argue that executive coaches should only promote and sell their services as an executive coach and not other alternatives, such as consultants or trainers. In their view, to do otherwise dilutes the message of the professional standing in the market that they are trying to achieve. Nevertheless, they do acknowledge that making a living as a coach, executive or otherwise, is difficult. This was indicated in Chapter 6, as executive coaches talked about the money, or lack of it, in executive coaching.

The same argument applies to executive coach educators or trainers, as it is in their best interests that clients accept that there is a difference between executive coaches and others, such as consultants. The educators and trainers also have a vested interest in selling their executive coach preparation to potential coaches, and different educators and trainers have created their own proprietary executive coaching systems, models and processes. Furthermore, some commercial executive coaching trainers such as the Institute of Executive Coaching have created their own conferences, and targeted clients with a view to having only their trained coaches work with them. This clearly negates the rhetoric of a unified profession being espoused by the professional associations, as there was no evidence of uniform standards or training requirements. Indeed, as these commercially oriented training organisations gained prominence in the market, it became more challenging for the professional associations to achieve their claim for professional status.

One area where theorization was examined was Return On Investment (ROI). In my discussions with executive coaches and the professional associations, ROI was often raised. It was considered important enough for executive coaches to see the need for including this in their service offering. Executive coaches claimed that the role they were performing would increase the client organisation's human capital, or what one of the executive coaches called, the "triple bottom line or a quadruple bottom line".

The leaders of the professional association for executive coaches were interested in establishing boundaries to create an area that was distinct from "other" occupations,

mostly consulting, and have to show that they distinctive expertise and deserved an exclusive jurisdiction. Nevertheless, in the interviews I conducted there were many executive coaches who were happy to call themselves executive coaches, however there were some that were not. This group that were reluctant to use the term “coach” would use other terms, such as leadership advisor. Some of these executive coaches indicated they often used different names to sell this proposition, including consulting, which in itself creates issues around boundaries of what they do. This can be seen in Chapter 4, whereby executive coaches will sell to whoever will buy the services, regardless of the name. Therefore, professional associations are often dealing with people who sell executive coaching services but who may not always call themselves executive coaches, again creating problems around boundaries.

The professional associations and educators and trainers, all worked very hard at establishing boundaries around the work they do, but how successful have they been? Professional associations, as well as the educators and trainers, want to establish boundaries. These groups believe that by establishing jurisdiction and expertise in the area of coaching, they will distinguish coaching from other occupations, for example consulting, and therefore they can claim a legitimate area of knowledge. If they are able to do this, it allows both these groups to create a system of credentialing for the occupation, creating a boundary around what they do. Therefore, they hope, using this jurisdiction and expertise, they are able “to carve out and control – ideally monopolise – an area of scarce knowledge and skill” (Reed, 1996, p.575). However, my research indicates that while this may be their *aim*, they will always face the difficulty of not having a clear and definite view of what makes executive coaching distinct, in other words, there is no distinct area that coaching can claim as being theirs. As such, this lack of clarity around executive coaching is problematic, and authors such as Whitmore (1996) and Whitworth et al (1998) amongst others, do not distinguish what makes it distinct from “other” occupations. This means that coaching or executive coaching is hampered by the “fuzzy” nature of coaching.

The same argument can be made with regard to intra-occupational boundaries. As stated earlier, executive coaching, and the professional associations aligned with executive coaches will often seek to differentiate themselves from other coaches, mostly life

coaches. This approach highlights Bucher and Strauss's (1961) discussion on the struggle between different groups within society. In this case we can see that executive coaching and life or business coaching form occupational segments. They argue that these groups will often be in conflict or will have a difference in their approach, and this difference will often show, and betrays the claims to unity from within the profession. The executive coaches, and their professional associations, are claiming a difference in the *quality* of performance, skills and attitudes between the work of executive coaches and "other" coaches.

What the executive coaches and their professional associations do is to make use of what Strauss (1982) referred to as "ideological weapons". Part of the claim made, by both executive coaches and their professional associations, is that the work they are providing relies on their experience as managers, and that this will help them in coaching other managers, something most life coaches cannot do. But, executive coaches often will provide a service that could be considered to be life coaching, if the person they are coaching has issues outside of work that impact on their ability to perform at work. So despite claiming that they "do not do" life coaching, the reality is, that they do. This lack of clarity around coaching does impact on the executive coaches' ability to claim a boundary around their work.

The trainers and educators of executive coaches also lent their support to the proposition that there was a difference to other types of coaching, as they have a vested interest in executive coaching being distinct. They believed that life coaching training did not cover areas such as ethics, mental health and other critical topics that they felt should be covered.

The claims to difference between life coaches and executive coaches had support from the clients interviewed. Some of these clients were quite forceful in how they viewed life coaches, and it was clear that the coaches they used needed to demonstrate that they could work with the executives. However, what is not clear is whether the clients were responding to the *claims* by executive coaches, or their professional associations, of there being a difference.

The claim for executive coaches to distinguish themselves from business coaches was not as clear-cut as they would have liked to imagine. Clients often did not distinguish between executive coaching and business coaching, with many not seeing a difference at all.

Compared to the established professions it is clear that despite the executive coaching professional associations' rhetoric, they are not gatekeepers able to control who uses the term executive coach or claims to practice as an executive coach. Furthermore, executive coaching could not demonstrate that they had an "independent and self-contained field of knowledge" (Fournier, 2000, p.78), which makes the process of establishing clear boundaries, and therefore claiming the status of a profession difficult. As stated earlier, it makes the claims to being a profession, based on exclusivity, dubious.

Being a Profession?

This leads us to the second question I asked: compared with traditional occupations that are commonly considered to be professions, what are the deliberate actions and strategies, both actual and rhetorical, that emerging occupations have used in their attempts to be considered professions, and what have they omitted and why?

Boundary setting is one element of potentially establishing a profession. Another part comes from credentialing, or as I have called it in Chapter 5, The Qualifying Process. This also relates to Chapter 6, Professional Identity – Rhetoric and Persuasion.

Social Closure – Credentialing

Knowledge, skills and expertise are the building blocks for creating and sustaining any occupation and profession, and over time they can become institutionalized within the way the occupation structures and organises its management systems and processes. Importantly, knowledge is the foundation for skills and expertise and the establishment of a boundary around that knowledge is an important part of the claim for being recognised as a profession. As stated the qualifying process is linked to the professional

associations' efforts to ensure that coaches, and in this case executive coach, become "credentialed".

So while it might be argued that credentialing is a form of boundary setting, it is much more than that. Boundary setting can be used by create areas of jurisdiction, but by utilising credentialing the occupation is wishing to create social closure. Social closure describes the actions used by a professional or occupational association to exclude potential competitors from encroaching on their knowledge and practice domain. Larson (1977) and Macdonald (1995) argue that social closure is about *improving the profession as a group*, and that controlling the market is critical to achieving social closure. Murphy (1988) states that credentialing is more than proving that the holder has a certain level of skills and knowledge that meet a profession's entry and practice criteria, rather it is more about how the credentials are *marketed* and *sold*. Freidson (1986) argues that having a strong system of credentialing will enable a profession to take control of who can undertake the specific work. But again, this does not appear to be how credentialing is playing out in the case of executive coaching.

It is argued that executive coaching has attempted to mimick the established professions, by introducing credentials as well as attempting to institutionalise their knowledge and practice in order to establish executive coaching as a recognised profession. While the professional associations, trainers and educators and to some extent executive coaches themselves, all agree that credentialing is "crucial" to being a good executive coach, or a coach of any sort, it does not appear to have had traction with the majority of executive coaches. We shall see later in the chapter how the executive coaches have reacted to the requirements for credentialing.

As stated in Chapter 5, beyond the broad scope of questioning and listening, the representatives of the professional associations found it difficult to articulate the required skills to be an executive coach. These skills, which they claim as being central to coaching, can relate to many occupations, be it a doctor or a consultant, indeed anywhere that questioning and listening are part of the task. Garman et al (2000) noted that there were no recognised standards to being a coach, and that the only criterion they saw was the ability to solicit clients.

Despite this inability to list skills required to be an executive coach, there is a belief by executive coaching professional associations that if executive coaching is to be considered a *profession* it needs to demonstrate the characteristics they believe are associated with professional status.

A key component of this requires coaches, executive and others, engaged in the practice of executive coaching to have specialist knowledge and distinctive skills. To achieve this, the professional associations, both generalist and specialist, believe that a coach, no matter what area they elect to practice in, needs to be credentialed. By undertaking credentialing, the professional associations believe that this will gain the recognition and respect from clients, the education system and importantly the wider community for credentialed specialist knowledge and distinctive skills of coaches.

The use of certification was another area of contention between practicing executive coaches and the professional associations. The use of certification is used to keep “others” out, and this was clearly demonstrated by the ICF, when the leader of the association stated, that only *certified* coaches would be providing coaching to IBM. Professional associations were interested in having coaches certified, even though the certification differed, by using trainers and educators. Educators and trainers were interested in certification, as it was their main income. The need for credentialing was emphasized by Anne Gorman, who was at that time a Director of the Institute of Executive Coaching. In an interview (Fox, 2002) she argued that the ability to hang out a shingle did not make someone a coach, and that to be a coach was far more complicated:

We've been going for three years and we originally set up because we were worried about the quality of coaching in Australia. A lot of consultants are jumping on the new, new thing. Consultants have gone into a dive and they are looking for the next thing. ... They need some training instead of thinking anyone can coach. We get approached all the time by people like that. They don't know what the essential qualities of a coach are. (Fox, 2002, p.2)

Implicit in this statement from Anne Gorman is the notion of the need for special training to be able to call yourself a coach – to be credentialed. It was not just something “anyone” could do - to be a coach requires education. This argument was aimed not just at potential coaches, but also at potential clients.

While the professional associations espoused the need for coaching credentials, the executive coaches themselves did not necessarily support certification or credentialing. The reasons for this were that they believed that their occupational qualifications would suffice, for example having a degree in accountancy or psychology. Also, if they had undertaken a training or a university based qualification, they believed that this was what was required and no further qualification were necessary. As one of respondents said “ I don’t need their credentialing because no one is asking for it”. This was true of those executive coaches who had undertaken the course offered at the University of Sydney, and as one of the executive coaches stated, a “university course is better than one offered by the ICF”. It was clear that the majority of executive coaches interviewed were not certified, and one did complain that being certified was another way to get coaches to pay more money to the associations. This was an indication that the executive coaches had a problem with the professional associations, as they saw the professional associations as making money from coaches. As Bucher and Strauss (1961) indicate, there may not be a “unity of interest” within the association, and this is potentially why many of the executive coaches interviewed, were not members of professional associations. Furthermore, executive coaches were interested in making money, as was indicated in Chapter 6 when one coach indicated that her focus was “working on our business”. However, the executive coaches did use ICF codes of ethics as part of their practice, even though they were not members of the ICF. The reasons was that the ICF codes of ethics were considered appropriate, and the executive coaches believed that providing a code of ethics would appeal to clients.

On the basis of the above it could be argued that while credentialing, as part of what an professional association offers, for example Master Certified Coach, and certification, usually what a student will get from a training course, is theoretically viewed as important to the coaching industry, credentialing of executive coach programs remains fragmented both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, the collapse of the Global

Convention of Coaching (GCC), which will be discussed later in the chapter, is an indicator of the lack of support and willingness to formalise credentialing across the executive coaching world.

Rhetoric – The Art of Persuasion

It has been noted before in Chapter 6, and it is worth repeating here, that Greenwood et al (2002), suggest,

...that at those moments, associations can legitimate change by hosting a process of discourse through which change is debated and endorsed: first by negotiating and managing debate within the profession; and, second, by reframing professional identities as they are presented to others outside the profession. This discourse enables professional identities to be reconstituted.
(p. 59)

My approach when analysing both interview texts and my review of the literature was on the frequency of terms. As Putnam and Fairhurst (2001 p.13) note, “what is present in the text conceals what is absent or implied in the discourse”. In undertaking this process I recognised that specific actors could inflate the frequency of terms in their endeavour to push the distinctiveness of executive coaching. My approach to critically analysing these terms was not positivist, rather it was used to facilitate understanding and potential discovery of what was absent and implied in the rhetoric used in the claim of professional status.

This use of language is evident in the early actions of the key leaders of executive coaching who created what they called a professional association, and in their mind created and promulgated the norms and values (evident from the different coach associations’ published charters and codes of ethics and conduct) they believed would standardise executive coaching practice and hence meet the criteria for recognition as a profession. However, coaches migrating mostly from consulting have in the majority failed to join these professional associations, but practice as executive coaches based on their mental model of what an executive coach should do. In their mind they are acting professionally without needing to be a member of a professional body. As highlighted

from interviews, few practicing coaches see any benefit from executive coaching being a profession. However, if the professional associations wanted to make it a profession, then executive coaches would accept that nomenclature, but a few would be looking to be “grandfathered” into the profession based on their experience.

If practicing coaches were members of one of the associations, what was their involvement? One of the participants in my study listed all the memberships that he had, and noted that there were so many that paying the fees was handled by his accountant. So what or how much could be his involvement be with the communities he had joined? The answer would appear to be, not much. Yet, the answer he gave was that to be a member gave him “in the loop” information as to what was happening. Indeed, he expressed dissatisfaction that his accountant forgot to pay one set of fees, though as he no longer worked in the industry and to try to re-enrol was too difficult and required “too much paperwork”. This refers us back to Maloney’s (2007) work on membership where he indicates that people will join communities, sometime not because they love the community, but that it is nice or useful to stay as a member, and as my respondent said, “in the loop”.

Maloney’s argument (2007) can also be applied to professional associations.

Professional associations need to have membership, with numbers large enough for them to appeal, firstly, to other coaches, or potential coaches, and secondly, to the clients and thirdly, to state regulators to enable the professional association to regulate themselves, or, in the case of psychology based associations, to help them get a license from the state. In light of this, the focus in my research has been on how the professional associations have used rhetoric and other strategies in an attempt to legitimise executive coaching, and on the professional associations’ published norms and values that attempt to change the mental model of other key actors, namely clients and training and education providers.

Inherent within the framework of Greenwood et al’s (2002) institutional change process and institutional logics is the recognition that the professional associations, in my case executive coaching, in their rhetoric are delivering a new value proposition to potential new members and other institutional actors. The value proposition is the overall

customer's view of what is of value from the offering organisation's single or bundled products and services.

However, as identified by Suddaby and Greenwood (2005, p. 36), institutional logics have within them contradictions. The logic of being a "profession" embodies a number of other institutional logics (Glynn and Lounsbury, 2005), including:

- a practitioner logic (the logic of being a practicing executive coach to make a profit from the practice);
- an academic logic (university and some training organisations' research and scholarship into what is executive coaching);
- a training logic (training organisations profiting from the development and delivery of executive training programs); and
- a client logic (executive coaching meets talent development requirements).

Of interest is the time lag of the entry of academic logic entry into the field of executive coaching. This gave the commercial training logic and practitioner logic, whose focus is on profit making, a foothold in delivering to clients their credentials and value proposition of what they had to offer. The reality has seen the academic logic, based primarily in the discipline of psychology, not support the case of executive coaching as a distinctive profession in its own right. In fact, academic psychologists with expertise in the area are against coaching, or executive coaching, calling itself a profession, as it does not have government regulation like other recognised professions. Rather, the psychologists are fighting a near rear guard battle to argue that there is a unique theory of executive coaching, but that theory belongs to psychology. In other words, the academics involved in these debates argue that for executive coaching to be "professional", its practitioners must be qualified psychologists, and that the field should be understood as a sub-branch of psychology.

The risk in the diversity within the institutionalized logics in the field of executive coaching, in the words of Myer and Rowan (1977 p. 357), is a "loss of legitimacy". The institutional logics are supposed to "underpin actors frameworks for reason and belief" (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005, p. 35) and to serve as principles and guidelines for

action, leaving room though for “organizations and individuals to elaborate” (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p. 248).

In the case of executive coaching, the evidence would suggest that the professional and academic logics have had difficulty in gaining the confidence and understanding of practicing coaches and to some extent clients, though clients can be more forgiving if they see a potential benefit. The professional associations actually allowed other actors, namely consultants, room for elaboration. This resulted in variations across the initial rise of executive coaching, that of talent development and perhaps codifying methods and techniques that supported the case for human capital. The academic logic has struggled to gain a solid footing in education, scholarship and research, and this is despite the establishment of journals, programs within universities and research. Part of the issue is that, in comparison to the commercial training and education organisations, who have not concerned themselves with these scholarly activities, the cost of a university qualification that will be recognized by clients as well as professional associations is quite high. As seen in Chapter 4, the cost for a university course could be \$22,000 as opposed to \$6,000 for a course from Institute of Executive Coaching.

A further element is the geographical space over which the change process is being made. While this thesis has only focused on Australia, the case for executive coaching to be recognised as a profession is being made globally. This adds a new dimension to the professionalization project and institutional change, as the framework of established professions is controlled by the state through the process of licensing.

While I did not ask a direct question on how long the executive coach association leaders expected the claim for professional status to take to be realised, subsequent conversations highlighted that they had not taken this aspect of change into account. In fact Greenwood et al (2002) do not indicate time frames for the process of institutionalized change to take place, however, the empirical case of change they considered, Canadian accounting, took place over six years. Again I did not ask specific questions in interviews on the anticipated speed of change the executive coaching association leaders expected, but subsequent conversations with the leaders clearly

indicated that the approval for codes or ethics, key criteria on what could be expected of coaches, happened far more quickly than they had anticipated or planned for.

Executive Coaches and Membership

As noted above, executive coaches have not embraced their professional associations. For associations such as the ICFA, gaining market share of the executive coach market has been very difficult. One reason is that the majority of ICFA members are life coaches, and executive coaches see their credentials and experience as being superior to life coaches. Furthermore, the value proposition being offered by the ICFA has failed to attract executive coaches. The ICF and ICFA have also failed to offer a specialist executive coach membership category. Other professional associations make joining them difficult. For example the APS (IGCP) requires that members are psychologists. While there are members who are not psychologists, they are not full members and so do not receive any of the voting rights they would otherwise be entitled to. Other groups such as the EMCC are restricted by location. While my findings indicated that of the sample of executive coaches interviewed, many were not aware of the different executive or general coaching associations available globally, but more importantly the majority explicitly indicated they had no motivation or intention to join an association.

The role of the State

A notable absence in executive coaching associations' claim to professional status is their failure to engage with government to obtain formal regulation, or licensing for the occupation. Most of the associations, such as the ICF/ICFA and ICCO, do not want government intervention, i.e. they do not want a license. There are others such as APS (IGCP) and the EMCC who are interested in gaining government intervention, as they do want a license or at least something similar, such as a restriction on who can call themselves a coach. The APS (IGCP) and EMCC believe that giving government a say, in who should, or should not be, part of the profession would guarantee that "cowboys" would be excluded. Furthermore, the APS (IGCP) also believe that the legislative restrictions on who can call themselves psychologists would place them in a position where they can have considerable influence over who should or should not be considered a coach or executive coach. Grant and Cavanagh (2004) make this point

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when they state, "...potential members will be required to make many difficult, unpleasant and often unpopular decisions. For example, there will be a need to submit to some form of regulation, normally at a government level, and decisions will need to be made on "who should be in" and "who should be out" based on *skills and knowledge*" (p.3 italics mine). Elliott and Alder (n.d.) had also made this claim by stating that the Australian government might look at regulating the industry.

In July 2002 the International Coach Federation (Australia) (ICFA) convened it's (sic) first conference...The conference was opened by the Federal Minister for Small Business, The Hon. Jo Hickey (sic), with the ringing remark – "There is no doubt that you are an industry, but are you a profession?" He added grist to it by saying "if you do not regulate yourselves then maybe the government will have to regulate the industry." (Elliott and Alder, n.d., 9)

Despite the above threat from both Elliott and Alder (n.d.) and the Australian federal government, no action has been taken on the idea of having coaching, and in particular executive coaching, established as a regulated profession. Indeed no action by any government has been taken to date.

There have been cases in the United States of America involving public regulation. In one instance, the state of Colorado began action against a coach who had not registered as an unlicensed psychotherapist. In the 2003 Colorado court case that followed, a coach was charged with practicing psychotherapy without a license, but the case was dropped as frivolous (Williams, 2006). However, although the case was dropped, the coach was required to register as an unlicensed psychotherapist, an action she refused to do. Williams then goes on to discuss the actions taken by the Colorado Coalition of Coaches in getting the state of Colorado to review the requirements for coaches and their achievement in doing this. This went further to cover the states of Minnesota, Florida, Washington, California and Ohio. This action was followed by the Colorado Coalition of Coaches becoming active in the state in an effort to have coaching recognised, not as an unlicensed psychotherapy, but as a separate though unregistered profession, based on the actions of the group. What is interesting about this case is that,

it is from *this* case, of having coaching listed as separate from psychotherapy, that it did achieve the aim of separating coaching from psychotherapy, certainly an aim of the ICF who have stated that they do not wish intervention from government (Williams, 2006).

In Europe the EMCC have been negotiating with European Commission to establish protocols for coaching, supervision, counselling and mentoring (Newsletter of the EMCC March 2007), though to date none of these actions has been fruitful. Though they have achieved a Europe Individual Accreditation for individual members of the EMCC and European Quality Award for training providers and educational institutions, which are members of the EMCC, both of these are recognised throughout Europe (Newsletter of the EMCC September 2009). The EMCC and the ICF decided to join together as the Global Coaching and Mentoring Alliance (GCMA), though as they claim this is not a “super group”. The GCMA have put forward a document “Professional Charter for Coaching and Mentoring”, and states that it is “the basis for the development of self-regulation for the coaching and mentoring profession” (EMCC, 2011). This document was also signed by the Association for Coaching (which signed in July 2012), and the Société Française de Coaching (who signed in January 2013). It is done within the guidelines of the European Union, but it is a long way short of licensing or even regulation. Furthermore, this document can only cover executive coaches who have signed up to it, but it would appear to be a move towards regulation.

Within Australia, while there has been no move from government, either state or federal, there is a group of executive coaches, trainers and universities seeking to introduce a “standard” for coaching that executive coaches can call upon when referring themselves to clients, and that clients can use in assessing coaches. As a prelude to this, this group are seeking to have Standards Australia to create a document that will refer to coaching as a “standard”. The different academic groups associated with executive coaching, such as the University of Sydney, Monash University and UTS, plus commercial training organisations, such as Institute of Executive Coaching have come together with professional associations, such as the ICFA and the APS (IGCP) to develop a Standard of Executive Coaching. This group is aiming quite squarely at clients, executive coaches and government. Indeed they have included clients on the list of consultants that advise on executive coaching (Whyte and Cavanagh, 2010). The

groups come from executive coaching and business coaching. While this particular group are not representative of the wider coaching community, they can, by having a standard approved, place coaching in a quasi-government setting, thus creating a “standard”. However, discussions with academic coaching psychologist Michael Cavanagh (2010) indicate that these standards are advisory only and will not be enforceable. This raises the question of who will use the standards if no one is being held accountable and who will manage the continual updating of the standard. Furthermore, the group involved with creating the standard does not involve members of life coaching, as the members of this group do not see life coaching as being distinctive enough to warrant a standard. Many of the executive coaches that I have spoken to are not aware of the standard and are not particularly interested.

If the professional associations are following what they believe to be the criteria for becoming a profession, it would seem odd that the professional associations, apart from the psychology based associations, do not wish to have coaching, or executive coaching, endorsed by the state and given a license to operate as a doctor or lawyer does. Why is this? The professional associations are undertaking the path the consultants have taken, avoiding “the most confining elements of professional status like state regulation” (McKenna, 2006, p.248). The professional associations, both general and specialist – but not the psychology based associations, have avoided the state’s involvement, claiming they do not wish to be tied down with “red tape”. This is possibly the case, but it does mean that they can avoid state regulation.

Clearly, the psychologists are interested in having a license, or regulations which restrict coaching to those who are registered as psychologists. This is what Abbott (1988) referred to as “turf wars”, where an occupation will put up a reason as to why their area should control the space. Therefore, it may be that if the psychologists *can* have coaching classified as “coaching psychology”, as mentioned in Chapter 5, and they *can* get the standards approved, as mentioned in Chapter 6, they *may* get acceptance from the clients and the general public. If they *do* then, potentially, they are half way there, meaning that the trade would be restricted to psychology or persons that are psychology-trained coaches. Would this create a problem for executive coaches and

other professional associations? Possibly yes, but my research indicates that it is unlikely for all these circumstances to happen.

Success or Otherwise?

This leads us to the final question I asked, which is, how can we explain the success or otherwise of emerging occupations in their quest for professional status?

Occupations that are seeking the status of a profession often find that the formation of a profession is not linear process, as they would have imagined it might be. For example, it might be believed that creating a body of knowledge, credentialing, professional associations and code of ethics would, and should, result in attaining professional status, especially as these are the features have been identified by some as characteristics of fully-fledged professions. What they often discover, however, is that “profession” is a *strategy* that requires a continuous process, involving the display of a professional image to audiences, such as clients, but also the public in general, making it a complex, ambiguous and difficult undertaking with no guarantee of success.

Furthermore, as Roth (1974) states, each step that is undertaken will have its own consequences and impacts across different actor groups. Understanding the strategy used requires professional associations to understand “who” are the target audience and “what” is required of them. In other words they need to know what is the *rhetoric* required. So when faced with a client, the professional association will adopt an image of what is required to allay their fears such as the quality of service. This is also part of what is required when appealing to new members, by claiming that “being part of our group will enable you to claim the quality of service”. When seeking approval from the state, it is important to be considered a homogenous group with legitimate motives. This is seen as critical, regardless of whether the association wants a license or will accept registration. What is needed in all of these encounters is that the professional association adopts and displays the *rhetoric* of a professional image, as we saw in Chapter 6 where the association attempts to dictate to executive coaches what they should wear and what they should say. Though displaying the rhetoric of professions can be seen as necessary, but not a sufficient factor for achieving state recognition.

Professional associations within executive coaching have been struggling with ensuring that the image they present is consistent across all the associations. As I stated earlier, in Chapter 4, while there are internal disputes located within professional associations of executive coaching they will band together to create a unified image to the world.

There is of course the possibility that resistance to coaching seeking a license from the state could come from executive coaches and professional associations, that are not psychology-based associations. The reason for the resistance would be that coaching would have to be codified, so that it would meet the criteria for having a license. In other words coaching would be contained and codified and have stated competencies. This challenge has happened in South Africa (Lane, 2012). Lane (2012) stated that the coaching community has been fighting a challenge by the psychologists to have licenses awarded. Because coaches know the impact could potentially put their livelihoods at risk, if psychologists were to gain a license, or something similar.

Lane (2012) argues, that if coaching is to flourish it may need to go down a path of having professional associations come together, as a loose association, and work to address the different aspects of coaching. Especially if they are tackling the question of at least trying to tackle the issue of the “fuzzy” nature of what makes up coaching. Would this work? My research has found that coaching professional associations have tried to do this, where the different groups came together to put forward answers and directions for executive coaching. What followed from this was the GCC. The GCC did attempt this by bringing together all of the more established associations, such as the ICF, Association for Coaching, EMCC, WABC, COMENSA, BPS (SGCP) and APS (IGCP). It also included educators and trainers from around the world including GSAEC, as well as coaches, from all sectors, executive, business and life coaches. Unfortunately this camaraderie did not last, with one of the groups withdrawing from the committee as they did not see the point of the meeting and did not believe that an attempt at unification would result. The steering committee, which in this circumstance consisted of psychologists, included Michael Cavanagh, David Lane and Dianne Stober. However, there is the possibility that other actors would believe, that, coaching was being “hijacked” by the psychologists. While I do not have any concrete examples of this, there is a feeling within the coaching fraternity that coaching was being “hijacked”

and this left an uneasy feeling within the fraternity. Furthermore, there have been papers that refer to the attempt at “psychologising” (Bluckett, 2004) of coaching.

Nevertheless, the fact the GCC was held once, shows that it is possible for all the groups to come together, and a concrete start could be made to discussing whether executive coaching should or could become a profession. However, their biggest hurdle would be accommodating the variations in goal and interests, because as stated earlier, “there is still a degree of rivalry and vying for status and position” (Jarvis, 2004, p.14). The final question focused on the effectiveness of the rhetoric employed by leaders of the emerging professional associations. As discussed above the strategies employed by the professional executive coaching bodies did not gain the recognition they had hoped for. It is evident to me, as a researcher, that the inability to frame what the issues of coaching are, into a coherent framework that all can follow, did create problems for them and has hampered the professional associations in their quest to become a profession.

But what of the executive coaching practitioners? These arguments about the direction of coaching would appear in principle to be of great concern to them. If the outcome of any of the initiatives is that a profession of coaching is established, what will be the requirements to join, if any, and what will be the dominant perspective? However, the discussions about professionalization would appear to be occurring at the level of the professional associations, with little or no involvement from everyday coaching practitioners, who are simply running their businesses, trying to make money and not go broke. Many of the coaches, I interviewed, in particular the executive coaches, showed little interest in the professionalisation attempts being undertaken in their name, stating they were too busy running a business to worry about a profession. Again, this apathy by executive coaches raises the issue of whether the professional associations are monitoring or at least keeping track of what executive coaches believe. So while there may not be a “unity of interest” (Bucher and Strauss, 1961), it could be that executive coaches may leave the association, if they belong to one at all.

Ultimately, the answer as to whether executive coaching is a profession may rest with the clients, should coaching stop being part of the process of developing staff. To date

clients appear to accept the provision of executive coaching services, but they do appear to less interested as to whether coaching becomes a profession or not.

Insights and future research

When I started out on this thesis some time ago, it was to study executive coaching as it attempted to progress towards a profession. This was of particular interest to me, as I had been working as an executive coach, yet, the talk of making coaching, and executive coaching a profession intrigued me. However, the issue became different in that I saw “what was coaching?” as part of a larger question, that is how did emerging profession make a claim to professional status? Who was instigating the professionalization, and why? Was being a profession of interest to all of the people involved, or only some?

The primary insight gained from this thesis is that while the professionalization project is linked to institutionalized change, it has a number of interrelated embedded layers, which are implied by Greenwood et al (2002) but not espoused. These layers reflect the macro and micro focus on the institutionalization change process and include:

- Descriptions of the theory and knowledge logics in use and espoused
- Theory and related knowledge claimed and contested by the emerging profession
- Practice standards and logics espoused by the professional association and adopted and used by practitioners
- Rhetoric engaged in by the professional association and its effectiveness in delivering institutionalized change. This includes the continuing narrative demonstrated through public forums and publications.
- Shared and not shared mental models in use by the different actors within the professional association
- Structures adopted by the institution and its regulatory governance, power and control relationships across the profession
- Contexts of time and location within which the emerging profession lays its claim.

While these layers are not in an order of priority, it is recognised that these operate within the system of institutional change and professionalizing. In this sense the layers

can be influenced from the top by leaders of the professional association and also from the bottom by practitioners. In the case of executive coaching's endeavours to achieve professional status it is evident that the leaders of the executive coaching professional associations have not explicitly come to grips with these layers as they are not overt. On this basis there is further opportunity to explore the relationship of these layers to institutional change and strategies related to professional projects and the Greenwood et al (2002) model is useful to help in determining these.

Additionally interviews for this project were undertaken during a period of a growing global economy that supported the idea of the war for talent and talent development. Since completing the interviews the world has entered a prolonged period of economic down turn with increased unemployment rates and hence a diminishing sense of a war for talent. Notwithstanding this, executive coaching remains a dominant force within talent development. The potential for further research includes such topics as understanding how external jolts generate the conditions in which new occupations emerge, whether there are variations in the timing and conditions under which they emerge, and how different occupation seek to establish their claim for professional status.

At the beginning of this chapter I asked if the emergence of executive coaching was deliberate or happenstance. Did McKinsey and other consultancies - who developed and fuelled the belief that a "war for talent" was on, and warned that organisations and their management had better beware - create a "perfect storm" that allowed executive coaching to emerge? The answer to this question is probably, yes, it was happenstance. This is despite the professional associations for executive coaching believing that the development of the profession was planned, it certainly got momentum from the McKinsey article.

Greenwood et al (2002) put forward a model that helps understand change. Their framework can be used to a certain extent, but if it is understood as a linear model, then there are issues in working out whether stages 3 and 4 can be used together, or whether occupations have to complete stage 3 before moving into stage 4. However, trying to determine whether or not a particular action should be located in stage 3 or stage 4 is

not easy to do. In the case of executive coaching, some actions can be seen as both stage 3 and 4 simultaneously, for example the credentialing process. In my view, this is due to the fact that what Greenwood et al (2002) have put forward is an abstract framework, which will not necessarily apply to all empirical instances, and the possibility of simultaneity needs to be taken into account. However, as a guiding framework the Greenwood et al (2002) model had been useful, as it examines how professional associations are attempting to move toward change. It should be noted that Greenwood et al (2002) developed their model in relation to an existing profession – accountancy – and in an attempt to apply it to an emerging occupation, a potential weakness requiring modification has been identified.

The actions and strategies of the main actors were explored in chapters 4, 5 and 6. The usefulness and I should add effectiveness, of these strategies has been discussed above in this chapter. The discussion highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of using the existing professional project concepts for a knowledge-based occupation seeking professional status in today's global environment. Larson (1977) and Abbott (1988) focused on traditional professions, and although Abbott (1988) states that all professions are “new” in the sense that they experience ongoing change, much of what he examines relates to existing or established professions. Thus, while the research of Abbott and Larson remains fundamental as a point of reference for understanding professionalization, it would be useful if researchers who are focused on the professions examined different and emerging professions as the conditions they encounter are different to those of the mid- to late 19th century when law and medicine began to emerge in their modern form. Leicht and Fennell (2008) argue that the “traditionally-defined professions have always walked a tightrope” (p.437) between ethics and the market efficiency. In the case of medicine, there is the question as to whether doctors continue to hold sway over the ethics and control of work. Certainly, medical practitioners do have a say on whether they behave in an ethical manner with their patients. However, the control of doctors over the health care labour process appears to be diminishing. As Leicht and Fennell (2008) state, the “new technological imperative” (p.442) of market efficiency, where medical insurers seek to influence the type and cost of treatment, means that the doctors themselves are no longer fully in control of their work. Furthermore, other health care occupations seek to “invade” the occupational

terrain previously preserved to doctors, in a process well described by Abbott (1988). Similarly, lawyers have seen attempts by practitioners without the full legal qualifications to undertake tasks such as conveyancing. It may be, ironically, that occupations such as executive coaching are seeking to professionalise at the same time that the advantages enjoyed by the traditional professions are being eroded.

Limitations

It is acknowledged that my study focused on Australia, and it is possible that other areas around the world may present different situations. As well, the study I have undertaken is a single case study, and while this does not allow for comparisons with other emerging occupations, I have not attempted to engage in a general study of the professionalization process, but rather as way of describing and explaining the ambiguities and contradictions of professionalization. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, there is the opportunity for others to study emerging occupations and to see whether they face similar, or different problems and opportunities. This may allow us to discuss what emerging occupations may face in seeking professionalization and whether professionalization is likely to achieve the ends sought by the occupation. However, there is the opportunity to briefly discuss other occupations that have attempted to professionalize such as consulting, which I have discussed earlier in Chapter 2, and HR practitioners, to see whether there is a similarity or difference in their approaches. First, I will examine consultants and their ability to create an image of professionalism. Next, I will examine HR practitioners and the use of credentialing as part of their approach to professionalisation.

Defining the nature of management consultancy is, as Fincham and Clark (2002) state, “a contentious task” (p.2). However, as stated earlier, consulting is an “insecure business” (Sturdy, 1997a), where consultants are often using the latest trend or fad to ensure ongoing work with their clients. A part of creating an image of professionalism, is the claim to respectability and substance. However, unlike executive coaching, there are no courses as such, that offer formal qualifications that would enable one to be able to call yourself a consultant. As McKenna (2006) states, not having explicit professional

credential means that the consultants will use language and metaphors of professionalism to create an image of certainty (p. 200). He goes on to say that:

...by assuming the outward appearance of a profession – including the rhetorical language, the career rewards, and the dignified style of client interaction – even as they avoided the most confining elements of professional status like state regulation, individual accreditation, and, most remarkably, professional liability (p. 248).

So it would appear that the use of the rhetoric of professionalism is vital to ensuring that consulting is *seen* as being a profession. Furthermore, consultants are attempting to achieve professionalization without state regulation and with no accreditation. This is in contrast with the professional associations of executive coaches, for which accreditation is seen as being *vital* to becoming a profession and is a cause that all professional associations pursue. However, the role of the state is more contentious with the different associations having different opinions. Psychology based groups are in favour of state regulation, which would tend to entrench the power of their specialty, whereas the specialist and general based associations are not.

Human resources specialists, who are employed in organisations rather than as consultants, are also interested in becoming a profession. Within Australia, these HR specialists are attempting to gain professional status through accreditation. The Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) is considered to be the premier professional association for HR practitioners and is establishing a credentialed path to being an HR professional. AHRI are stating that to work in HR you must have a qualification provided from AHRI, or from a university with which they have established a link. Yet despite these initiatives many AHRI members that the association might wish to pursue a professional path do not appear to be enthused about whether they meet the criteria put forward (Wright, 2008). What is interesting is that Wright's (2008) discussion is eerily similar to the claims put forward by the executive coaching respondents in this thesis to their professional association. This includes responses to the effect that AHRI is seen "as weak, lacking in relevant expertise and made up of practitioners of lower standing" (p.1079) almost match the statements made by executive coaches in discussing their general professional association.

Both the professional associations of executive coaching and HR practitioners are attempting to establish themselves as professions, and both are pursuing credentialing as part of achieving professionalization. Yet, the executive coaches are not that interested in achieving professionalization, they often believe they are “professional” in their work anyway, but they will accept a more formal status if it is accorded to them without further effort on their part. This would appear to be similar to the HR practitioners.

But all of these groups, executive coaches, consultants and HR practitioners, are relying on the rhetoric of being a professional. That is, by saying, “we are a profession”, they might convince people that they are a profession. In the words of one professional association member, “Well if there are a lot of coaches out there saying it is a profession and calling it a profession and society accepts that....well that is it then. It is all about perception.”

However, it is noted that some occupations that have long aspired to professional status, or believed that they have attained it, such as nursing, have not displayed what are considered to be critical aspects of professionalization, such as control over their work. Indeed, nurses have, in the past, been described as “semi-professions” (Etzioni, 1969). It is noteworthy that the role of nursing is undertaken predominantly by women, and being in a feminised workforce certainly impacts on their ability to gain the status of profession. The feminisation of nursing has been studied by many authors, (Witz, 1992; Brannon, 1994; Davies, 1996; Broadbent, 1998; Hallam, 2002), and while the issue of gender segregation is not part of my thesis, the impact of being considered a profession (or not) is, and so the problems of nursing are relevant.

Nursing has been dogged as having a “poor public image” (Hallam, 2002, citing Thackery) from the time that it emerged as a distinct occupation rather than simply the caring activities that traditionally were seen as “women’s work” largely performed at home. Yet, professionalism is based on “expertise deriving from a formalised training based on science” (Davies, 1996, p.669) and nursing training is now undertaken at university. However, Hallam (2002) found that the perception of nursing was not only gender specific, but also it was considered to be a low status occupation with limited skill. She found many of her interviewees in the study of young people’s perceptions,

stated that nursing is still considered to be “dirty work” and does not generate the status associated with the profession of medicine. Furthermore, while claiming to be a profession, nurses are not considered by the public to be a “real” profession. These perceptions link back to the role of nursing as a “help” to doctors, and as such they are still seen in the context of doctors who have a dominant position within health care. Therefore, nurses have not been able to promote themselves as a profession. Despite meeting some of the criteria associated with traditional professions, it would appear that their claims to professionalization have not really been successful. Whether this will change with the emergence of “nurse practitioners” operating independently of doctors remains to be seen, though based on the experience of occupational health nurses, who have worked in industrial settings with considerable autonomy from doctors for the past one hundred years, this may not be sufficient.

Thus other occupations, some new, such as consultants and HR practitioners, and some old, such as nursing, have aspired to professionalization without success. The reasons as to why these occupations have not been successful would appear to vary. Nursing has been considered to be a low status occupation in comparison to medicine, even though nursing now requires a university degree. Nevertheless nurses have not gained control over their work. HR practitioners have sought to introduce credentialing, while management consultants have not even pursued that avenue, thus both occupations rely primarily on rhetoric to elevate their status. Executive coaches appear similar to consultants and HR practitioners, despite pursuing what are commonly considered to be some key hallmarks of a profession. Thus there would appear to be no common path or factors that determines how an occupation, new or old, can mount a persuasive case that they are "professional". Gaining further insight to do this would require other emerging occupations to be examined, and therefore, constitutes an area for further research.

However, examining executive coaches has allowed me to have access to the key instigators of the professionalization process in one emerging occupation, and so has given me a rich vein of ideas and understanding of the complications that the each of the interviewees faced. As such, whilst I acknowledge the limitations of the research, I believe that it was possible to achieve a rich data set that adequately answered my research questions.

Final Comments

What I have looked at in this thesis is not whether executive coaching can be considered a profession or not, nor it is an examination of a failed attempt, but it is an examination of the strategies that professional associations and other key actors, such as educators, executive coaches and clients, undertake to create an image of professionalism. What I have done is to examine the ways that an emerging occupation seeks to manipulate the impression of professionalism. Often the professional associations, in this case the ICFA and the APS (IGCP), believe that what they are undertaking is a professional project by adhering to the “rules” or criteria as put forward by the functionalist writers on professions, such as a body of knowledge, code of ethics and credentialing (see Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1964). By achieving these items, the professional associations hoped they could claim the use of the term “profession” by cherry picking the criteria that they wanted, while at the same time avoiding the issue of state licensing. However, what they are achieving is the illusion, a peculiar social construct, of professionalism, by using the *rhetoric* of what makes a professional a professional.

The words of Gertrude Stein, American poet and novelist, ring true when she said “[t]here is no there there”. Gertrude Stein was referring to where she lived, and what she had imagined was “there” had changed and altered so much, it was not “there” at all. The professional associations, of all persuasions, have built what resembles a “cargo cult” in the form of a profession. They have established boundaries around the work of coaching, they have developed and established credentials, they have tried to create what they believed coaching, and executive coaching, would look like as a profession. Indeed many of the professional associations have been aware of the lists developed by Carr-Saunders and Wilson as a template to what a profession should look like. The professional associations have established what they believed a “profession” would look like, but what they have imagined becoming a profession would provide is often an illusion, “there is no there there”.

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule – Client Based Organisations

How do you define coaching?

In your opinion what are the reasons that coaching has emerged?

When did your organisation start using coaches?

What circumstances led your organisation to seek out the services of coach?

How frequently does your organisation use coaches?

When you began using coaches in what capacity were they used? Was it for performance deficiencies or proactive development?

Is that the same reason that you use coaches now?

When hiring coaches what criteria do you use?

What specific skills, competencies or experience are you looking for in your coaches?

Is specific coach training necessary? Why/Why not?

Are coaches used throughout the organisation?

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Do you see a difference in coaches when seeking coaches for different levels in the organisation?

Do you use coaching services from organisations or people who do not specifically market themselves as coaches?

Do you use coaches for any other purposes eg mentoring or consulting or training?

Which member coaching bodies are you aware of?

Do the coaches you hire need to belong to a professional association? If so why?

Do you think being a member of a professional association gives you a guarantee of service?

A number of separate coaching bodies are working towards having coaching being recognised as a profession. What does the term 'profession' mean to you?

What have you heard or know about this?

What does this move to create a profession mean to you?

What advantages or disadvantages do you see if coaching is recognised as a profession?

What do you think are the circumstances necessary for creating a coaching profession?

What do you see as the future of coaching?

Interview Schedule – Coach Member Body

Could you give me a brief history of your organisations (eg when did it start, why was it started, has it merged with any other body)?

What is the extent of your organisations recognition and current operations – US based, US and Europe, National?

What is the organisations structure of the body – charity, trust, not for profit, for profit etc

How is the organisation coordinated (representative structure)?

How many full time employees are there and where are they located?

Of these how many are coaches?

What is the current structure of the organisation – international, national, branches, local member networks?

How many members are there in your:

- a) organisation?
- b) Branch?

How many are active members?

What activities do you run?

What turnout do you get at these activities?

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How does the body currently function in relation to coaching? Is there regulated entry, different classifications of members, need for continuing development, or dissemination of best practice?

What do you see as the specific skills, competencies or experience needed by coaches?

What are the entry requirements for each level?

What if any are the requirements for maintaining membership?

I'm interested to what extent coaching is a profession. First, could you tell me what you think a profession is?

To what extent does coaching currently match your definition of a profession?

Is it important for coaches to be considered a profession?

What value does the organisation see for coaching being recognised as a profession?

What do you think are the circumstances necessary for creating a coaching profession?

What action is your organisation taking to achieve this?

Who within your organisation is championing this cause?

What will this mean for your members?

What kind of "professional" development is available to your members and non-members?

Is supervision provided to members?

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

If coaching is recognised as a profession what do you think this will mean for professional development of coaching? What changes in development do you think you will deliver?

What coaching skills and knowledge do you think will be needed in the near future and longer term? Why?

What external changes do you anticipate will change coaching as an occupation or profession and the role of this association?

What are the typical career paths for a coach?

What do you see as the future of coaching?

Interview Schedule – Coach Training Organisations

How do you define coaching?

In your opinion what are the reasons that coaching has emerged?

When did your organisation first start training coaches?

Does your organisation train people in other areas apart from coaching?

What was the reason for establishing a coach training program?

What criteria do you use for selecting people for coach training? Or can anyone receive training?

How long is your training program?

What do participants have to do to receive a certificate of completion?

What levels of coach training does your organisation provide? Basic, Intermediate or Advanced.

Do you specialise in coach training for the different areas of coaching e.g. Executive, Business or Life coaching?

Do you see these areas requiring different skills?

Does your organisation provide follow up training or supervision?

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

What specific skills, competencies or experience do you think coaches need to have to call themselves a coach?

Which member coaching bodies are you aware of?

Does your coach training have certification from any of the coach member bodies?

Do you think that certification is necessary?

A number of separate coaching bodies are working towards having coaching being recognised as a profession. What does the term 'profession' mean to you?

What have you heard or know about this?

What does this move to create a profession mean to your organisation?

What advantages or disadvantages do you see if coaching is recognised as a profession?

What do you think are the circumstances necessary for creating a coaching profession?

What do you see as the future of coaching?

Interview Schedule for Coaches

In your opinion what is coaching?

Why do you think coaching has emerged?

What circumstances led you become a coach?

What type of an organisation do you work in? Sole practice, partnership, employee
(permanent or contract)

What did you do before coaching?

What level of education did you attain?

- HSC
- TAFE
- Bachelor
- Higher degree (Honours, Masters, Doctorate)

If university? What did you specialise in?

Did this help in undertaking coaching work?

Did you have specific coach training?

If so, what training did you undertake?

Do you think specific coach training is necessary to be able to call yourself a coach?

Why/Why not?

What specific skills, competencies or experience do you think are necessary for coaches?

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If someone was not aware of what coaching was how would you describe what you do?

How do you describe yourself as a coach?

There are many descriptors for coaches e.g. Executive coach, Business Coach, Life Coach. What do you see as the differences between these?

If Executive Coach – what levels do you coach?

You supply coaching services to individuals/organisations, what do you think the term coaching means to them?

Coaching is a service industry such as consultants, accountants or lawyers, so what is it that you do that is different from them?

What other services do you offer to your clients?

What percentage of your income base is derived purely from coaching work?

Which member coaching bodies are you aware of?

Are you a member of a professional coaching body? If so which one/s?

Why/Why not are you a member?

Do you take an active role within this body? If so can you please explain?

What advantages do you see of being a member of this association?

A number of separate coaching bodies are working towards having coaching being recognised as a profession.

What have you heard or know about this?

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

In your opinion what do you think a profession is?

To what extent does coaching currently match your definition of a profession?

Is it important for coaches to be considered a profession?

What do you think are the circumstances necessary for creating a coaching profession?

What advantages or disadvantages do you see if coaching is recognised as a profession?

For you as an individual?

For coaching as an occupation?

What do you see as the future of coaching?

Appendix 2



The University of Sydney

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Richard Hall

Associate Professor of Work and Organisational Studies

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The University of Sydney

NSW 2006 Australia

Telephone: +61 2 9351 5621

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Email: r.hall@econ.usyd.edu.au

Dear

We are undertaking a research project examining coaching within organisations. This letter seeks your support to participate in this project. Your participation will involve approximately one hour of your time for an interview. The process is voluntary and you may elect to withdraw from the project at any time.

I have attached an information sheet on the project.

Elly Meredith will be conducting the research and she will contact you within the next two weeks. If you have any questions regarding this project please do not hesitate to contact either Elly Meredith or myself.

Thanking you for your time.

Yours Sincerely

Richard Hall

Associate Professor

Work & Organisational Studies



The University of Sydney

ABN 15 211 513 464

Richard Hall

Associate Professor of Work and Organisational Studies

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT
Research Project

Title: A Study of Coaches in Organisations

(1) What is the study about?

The study is to examine both the emergence and the future of organisational coaching.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Elly Meredith and will form the basis for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Associate Professor Richard Hall.

(3) What does the study involve?

The study involves an interview with Elly Meredith. This interview will be recorded through

the use of a digital recorder to enable content analysis, though only the researchers involved will have access to these recordings.

(4) How much time will the study take?

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent. You may of course withdraw from participation in the study at any time.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

The study will provide the opportunity for participants to reflect on their own experiences with coaching.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you may tell other people about the study.

Title: A Study of Coaches in Organisations

(9) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, Elly Meredith will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Associate Professor Richard Hall on (02) 9351 5621.

(10) What if I have a complaint or concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811 (Telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (Facsimile) or gbriody@usyd.edu.au (Email)

This information sheet is for you to keep



The University of Sydney

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I,, give
consent to my participation in the
Name (please print)
research project

TITLE: **A Study of Coaches in Organisations**

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.
3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any

time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

Signed:.....

.....

Name:

.....

.....

Date:

.....

.....

Appendix 3

NVivo (Bazeley, 2007) was used as a method of collecting and analysing data. The transcribed interviews were reviewed and the themes and sub-themes were adjusted over many readings of the data.

The main themes were Boundary Setting, The Qualifying Process and Professional Identity. From these themes the following sub-themes emerged from the interviewees. While the sub-themes have been listed as being predominantly one area, the answers if appropriate, were used in other sub-themes. It should also be noted that interviewees fitted into more than one category and some fitted into all, coach, professional association, educator/trainer and client. While they were listed under one category for analysis, their answers did inform other areas, and they were listed under both those categories in the analysis.

Boundary Setting

Definition of coaching

Background – degree

Reason as to why coaching

Differences in coaching

How were the differences distinguished?

Positive

Negative

The Qualifying Process

Skills and Expertise

Credentialing/Qualifications – necessary or not

Becoming a Profession? Executive Coaching in Australia

Criteria for coaches

Levels of experience

How are coaches distinguished?

Positive

Negative

Professional Identity

What is a profession?

Is coaching a profession?

Role of professional associations in coaching

Coaching as a living

Role of government

Future of coaching

Positive

Negative

