Values and Ethics in Coaching

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What are Values and Ethics?

Chapter aims

- To explore the origins and meanings of the terms 'values' and 'ethics'.
- To introduce ways in which personal values and ethics can impact on the coaching practice.
- To familiarise coaching trainees and coaches with the codes of ethics of professional coaching associations.
- To discuss and dispel the myth of a universally accepted ethical code of practice.

Chapter overview

In this chapter, we discuss the meaning of the words 'values' and 'ethics', offering a brief philosophical overview of the origins of these concepts. We then explore some of the key ethical issues that are relevant to the coaching practice. We place particular emphasis on the unregulated landscape in which coaching is situated and which is partly accountable for the lack of coherent ethical guidelines that could underpin the coaching profession. We also look at the distinct ethical codes that have been developed by prominent professional coaching bodies. We conclude the chapter by highlighting the significance of understanding your

values and constantly reflecting on their impact on your development as a coach and your coaching practice.

Key words

values, ethics, ethical conduct, professional coaching associations

Introduction

In the course of your coaching training, practice and even accreditation, you will often come across phrases like 'personal values', 'professional ethics' and 'ethical' and 'unethical' practice. We like to think that most coaches ground their coaching practice on a set of values that aim to support clients in achieving their goals. Yet, it is inevitable that during our coaching practice, we will be placed in a position of having to make ethical decisions, wondering what is morally right or wrong. Such decisions will involve issues ranging from the gravely serious to the mundane. If you have developed a warm and trusting relationship with your client, for instance, would you consider having dinner with her after the coaching session? If your coaching client has revealed to you that she illegally claims benefits that she is not entitled to, do you report her? Or do you carry on coaching a client who shows clear signs of mental illness but does not wish to admit it and is keen to continue the coaching process?

Such ethical questions are central to coaching. In fact, they are central to any professional activity that involves supporting other people, in one way or another. This book will help you explore issues of values and ethics that you might face in your own coaching practice. It will do so by delving into the nuanced differences of the different applications of coaching. But, before we embark on this journey of exploration, we invite you to consider the meaning, *your* meaning, of the terms 'values' and 'ethics'.

Pause for reflection

Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions. You can even consider jotting down your answers:

- What is your own definition of the word 'values'?
- What is your own definition of the word 'ethics'?

What are values?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'values' as: 'principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgement of what is important in life'. Values dictate what is actually important to us. Many a time they equip us with the drive and motivation to do something. Importantly, values determine how we feel after having taken a particular decision. Contrary to skills (which can be learnt and cultivated), values are inherent and, while they can be consciously explored, they cannot be easily altered.

The word 'value' has different meanings that are all grounded in basic personal preferences and choices of importance. From a numerical perspective, if you believe that the value of your car is £10,000, it means that you will preferably choose to exchange it for a sum of money only if it is equal to £10,000 or higher. From a personal perspective, when you say to a friend 'I value your opinion', it means that this friend's opinion is important to you and that you choose to take it into consideration. From a cultural perspective, the priorities set within the community or society in which you live are bound to affect your choices. In a democratic state, for instance, personal freedom will take precedence over, say, rigid religious directives or social cohesion that might be more pronounced in other societies. The environment in which you are reared, be it family, school or the local community, will most probably have a strong influence on the values and the value system you adopt.

A value system is a set of personal and cultural values evolved and accepted by a person, community or society as a standard moral code that guides one's behaviour. This set of values is not easily changeable and, at times, we can even define it using a specific term: 'I am a socialist', 'I am a Christian', 'I am a European.' For most of us, such beliefs and attitudes are imprinted in our inner being and dictate how we make decisions for what is morally right or wrong. In fact, they influence the way in which we think, judge and act, and shape our overall conduct in life. In other words, our value system shapes the identity we develop within a society. When we talk about 'Christian values', 'American values' or 'working-class values', we are talking not only about the values of an individual but also about the set of values shared by an entire community. Different circumstances and traditions will influence the diverse criteria that communities and cultures use to prescribe their preferences and choices.

Values in coaching

This plethora of culturally based values that can be held by an individual is bound to penetrate professional contexts, including that of coaching. Consider, for instance, the following scenarios:

- Due to unforeseen circumstances, you have been forced to reschedule an appointment with a client three times. You finally manage to agree on a specific day and time. But, then, your 8-year-old son informs you that his school's play, in which he is participating, happens to be taking place on that particular day and time. Do you reschedule your appointment with your client yet again?
- An employee you directly line-manage has started to show clear signs of deteriorating performance due to a personal family crisis. Your own line manager suggests that you take the role of your employee's coach in order to support her during this tremulous time. Do you accept?
- You are appointed as a coach in a high-profile organisation. Your responsibility is to coach managers who are facing the prospect of dismissal. The organisation's human resources (HR) manager directly asks for your input as to who should be laid off. Do you offer your views?
- A good friend has decided that she needs coaching for personal and professional purposes. She knows that you are very successful in your job and asks you to be her coach. Do you consent? If so, do you charge a fee?

The choice you make in any of these scenarios will primarily depend on the set of consequences that are more preferable to you. In your view, is maintaining client satisfaction more important than your child's play? Do you think that one should keep their personal and professional life separate? Is it your duty, as a coach, to determine who can succeed or fail in a professional context? Can someone assume the role of a good friend's coach? If so, is it acceptable to charge money for the service provided? The course of action that you take to address such ethical dilemmas will be determined by your values. These may be either inherent or you have chosen to adopt them as part of a professional code of ethics.

Pause for reflection

Take some time to consider the scenarios listed above:

- What choice would you make?
- What personal values would you base your decision on?

As we have already ascertained, values are a set of personal principles that guide our behaviour and, by extension, our coaching practice. While

you are reflecting on these hypothetical dilemmas, you may notice that values can, at times, be conflicting. You may feel, for instance, that your strong work ethics do not allow you to reschedule your appointment with your client but, as a parent, you feel that it's your obligation to be present at your child's play. Indeed, these are difficult decisions exactly because they involve balancing contrasting values. How we deal with such contrasting values and how we choose to make one set of values override another is something that we will keep coming back to in this book.

A brief philosophical overview of values

As we have already established, values are, in one way or another, associated with choice of action. They dictate not what we do but what we feel we *ought* to do. You see, you can always consider the positive and negative consequences of a situation before deciding on a course of action. But your sense of what you *ought* to do will help you determine which set of consequences you prefer. This observation takes us all the way back to the Scottish Enlightenment and one of its most prominent exponents, the Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume (1711–76).

Contributions from philosophy: David Hume

In his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (2007 [1739]), David Hume attempted to explore the psychological basis of human nature and argued that feelings, rather than reason, dictate human behaviour. In stark contrast to the contemporaneous Cartesian notion of 'I think, therefore I am', Hume promulgated the view that: 'Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason' (ibid.: 458).

It follows that, for Hume, human beings are inherently more interested in how things ought to be, rather than what they actually are. Additionally, Hume saw no causal relationship between an *ought* and an *is*. He could not believe that what we *ought* to do derives from what we actually *do* (ibid.: 420). The question of how *ought* can be derived from *is*, also known as the *ought-to* problem or Hume's Law, has become one of the central questions of ethical theory. For our purposes, what is important to take from Hume's thinking is that, when it comes to making ethical decisions, what guides our actions is not what we know but how we feel about it.

How we feel about an action is influenced by the environment in which we are reared. This is made up of the society in which we are brought up and by the specific societal subgroups in which we take part. Such subgroups include gender, age group, ethnic or geographical community, occupational group, and political party and class, among others. Inevitably, we tend to subscribe to several of the values our society espouses. In other words, our values are shaped by what Michel Foucault termed 'the regime of truth' of our society.

Contributions from philosophy: Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault argued that: 'every society has its own regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true' (Foucault, 1980: 131). This 'regime of truth' will most probably influence the development of our value system.

These societal values tend to change and evolve, as we move from subgroup to subgroup. Have your political or religious values changed as you moved from one age group to another? Has the priority of your values altered if you have moved from one country to another? Taking time to reflect on these questions, we might realise how a particular societal consensus influences our values and, most importantly, how tacitly ongoing this process is. Beckett and Maynard explicate this change through a series of examples, some of which are the following:

- *Sexual behaviour*: Sixty years ago in Britain, premarital sex was, generally speaking, socially unacceptable, while same-sex relationships were only decriminalised in 1967. While these attitudes are now considered anachronistic in most European countries, in some other parts of the world such beliefs remain unaltered. In fact, there are still countries where same-sex sexual relationships are subject to legal sanctions, including the death penalty.
- *Corporal punishment*: While half a century ago it was acceptable to discipline a child by means of corporal punishment at school, in most European societies nowadays even a smacking of the hand can lead to a lawsuit.
- *Freedom of expression*: In today's digital world of social media and freely available pornography, we can surmise that freedom of expression has come a long way. Still, devastating events like the killings of the *Charlie Hebdo* employees in Paris in January 2015 could suggest otherwise. So can the long list of assassinated journalists, compiled by UNESCO on a yearly basis (see the organisation's website).

- *The sanctity of life*: Although most societies assign an inestimable value on human life, there is no consensus regarding what justifies taking a life. The death penalty, for instance, is still considered an appropriate form of punishment in several states in the USA, while it is no longer acceptable in Europe. Moreover, while abortion and euthanasia are contentious practices in many societies, both are more openly discussed. In fact, in some societies, like in Britain, abortion is legal and state-provided. (2013: 15–16)

Undoubtedly, other examples of recent changes in what society deems morally *right* or *wrong* will come to mind, and the more you think about them the more radical differences you will find amongst contemporary societies and cultures. Consider, for example, attitudes towards the role of men and women in society, single or same-sex parenthood, or prostitution. In March 2015, for instance, 1 in 20 UK-based students were reported to have sought employment in the sex industry for financial benefit, and the numbers are likely to increase (Sagar et al., 2015). Where do you stand on sex work as a means of tackling the mounting costs of a university degree? What matters most – the end or the means?

It follows, then, that just because you grew up in a society that has instilled in you certain commonly accepted values, this does not mean that your personal values will not, at times, clash with the former. It is inevitable that, in both personal and professional contexts, you may find yourself disagreeing with other people as to what constitutes 'right', 'appropriate' or even 'normal' behaviour. You may also realise that even deeply rooted, widely accepted values can collide. Consider, for instance, potential contradictions in the following conflicting values – loyalty vs honesty, competition vs cooperation, freedom of information vs national security, confidentiality vs safety, equality vs individuality, and tradition vs novelty.

Pause for reflection

- Do you have any conflicting values that may affect your coaching practice?
- Have you found yourself in a position where you have had to compromise one value for another?

As a social being and as a professional, you will more often than not struggle with conflicting values – personal, professional, societal, even organisational – when it comes to taking decisions and proceeding

to action. This becomes more complicated when your occupation involves working closely with people and helping them with personal or professional issues. The practical application of your values in the form of decisions and actions is bound to be guided by rules and codes of conduct. These rules of conduct can be summed up in one term, *ethics*.

What are ethics?

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'ethics' are: 'moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity'. Ethics, therefore, refer to a person's decisions and actions, as dictated by their beliefs and values. Put more simply, ethics is the practice that determines what is good or bad, right or wrong (de Jong, 2010). In comparison to values, ethics do not merely relate to 'our general notions of what is important, but to actual rules, codes, and principles of conduct' (Beckett and Maynard, 2013: 20). In other words, ethics can be seen as the practical application of values. In coaching, according to de Jong (2010), ethical principles determine the virtue of helping others, focusing on the needs and interests of the client, honouring trust and confidentiality, and promoting individual autonomy. But this is a lot easier said than done. Let's unpack this with a hypothetical example.

Story from practice

Irene is an experienced coach who was recently employed by a governmental organisation to coach Mike, a senior manager who has been struggling to adjust to the organisational changes that the newly appointed CEO imposed. During their penultimate coaching session, Mike reveals to Irene that he wittingly took advantage of the company's travel expenses policy to claim more money than he was actually entitled to. With one coaching session to go before she completes her work in that organisation, Irene is faced with a great ethical dilemma. Does she maintain her client's confidentiality, a value that underpins her professional ethics, or does she report Mike (and, if so, to whom?), respecting the organisational (and societal) values of honesty and justice? Questions to consider:

- What is Irene's responsibility to Mike? To the organisation?
- How can Irene address this issue without violating Mike's confidentiality?
- What could Irene do to prevent this kind of ethical dilemma arising in the future?

The way in which Irene will respond to this ethical challenge will depend on which of her values take precedence over others. Clear contracting at the outset of the coaching relationship – a topic that we will discuss in detail in Chapter 3 – can help anticipate such ethical challenges. Still, while the process of exploring this issue can be unpleasant, it can also provide an excellent opportunity for learning, both for the coach and the coachee. Irene can invite Mike, for instance, to explore the reasons that led to his misconduct and what he considers to be the best course of action henceforth, from an ethical perspective. In this way, the exploration of ethical behaviour can be a powerful learning tool for both the coach and the coachee.

A brief philosophical overview of ethics

Historically, ethics can be traced back to the work of ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates (*c.*470–399 BC), Plato (*c.*428–*c.*348 BC) and Aristotle (384–322 BC). Ethical behaviour for them depended on different factors. While for Socrates moderation was a key determinant of what is right or wrong, Plato advocated the denial of any bodily pleasure. He believed that happiness, known as *eudaimonia* in Ancient Greek, could be achieved by living a life of virtue, *arete*. So did Aristotle, but the two disagreed on what constituted virtue. For Plato, virtue was a product of knowing what is good. Knowing what is good – that is, wisdom – implied doing what is good. This, according to Plato, was sufficient to achieve *eudaimonia*. For Aristotle, knowledge of what is good was inadequate in the pursuit of *eudaimonia* without also practising good (Crisp, 2013). The historical ruminations over these early philosophic views on good paved the way for the development of moral philosophy.

Moral philosophy is primarily concerned with what is 'right' or 'wrong' behaviour; it has produced a variety of ethical models to answer this question. In the Western world, primarily in Europe and North America, deontological ethics and utilitarian ethics have been the two prevailing ethical models. *Deontological* ethics are premised in the doctrines of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who situated reason at the core of morality. In essence, deontological ethics derive from one's sense of duty and obligation and are grounded in a set of universal beliefs about the nature of reality. *Utilitarian* ethics are based on the writings of David Hume, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–73). Contrary to deontological ethics, utilitarian ethics focus on the maximisation of utility for the benefit of society. Whether an action is right or wrong is judged by an evaluation of its positive and negative consequences. In the final analysis, the deontological approach sees human beings as ends in

themselves, while the utilitarian approach considers them as means to an end (Bond, 2015: 47).

Several other ethical approaches have sprung up, primarily as a result of the competition, if not restriction, of the deontological and utilitarian ethics. A revival of Aristotle's ethics generated *virtue* ethics. Virtue ethics dictate that it is not duties, obligations or consequences that determine the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of an action, but the virtues that enable an individual to grow and develop (see, for instance, Hursthouse, 1999). *Ethics of care* is a feminist approach to ethics that recognises the female experience of living with the dependency of others, for instance children (Gilligan, 1993). It is closely related to virtue ethics and, in practice, it accentuates the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of an action as an implication of interconnectedness. As Koggel and Orme (2010: 109) prosaically summed up, ethics of care 'emphasizes the importance of context, interdependence, relationships, and responsibilities to concrete others'.

Of course, where there is more than one person involved, the question of power will inevitably arise. If a physician and a patient disagree on the significance of the patient's physical symptoms, who is right? The one with the expert knowledge or the one with the direct experience? More pertinently nowadays, consider how in several capitalistic societies the financial promiscuity of banks is tolerated by governments, compared to the financial promiscuity of individuals. This takes us back to Karl Marx's (1818–83) ideas of values and morals being dictated by the most powerful in a society. When we think in this way, we are bound to ask the question: 'Whose interest would this serve?' This approach has been termed *ethics of power and structure* (Becket and Maynard, 2013: 23).

All of these approaches to ethics (and several others that we have not discussed) depend on various factors and cannot easily converge into one coherent and universal ethical approach that every one of us can employ. This postmodern doubt of the possibility of producing a universally distinct ethical system has generated *discourse* or *narrative ethics* (see, for instance, Habermas, 1990; and Newton, 1997). This approach is grounded in a postmodern assertion that a universally distinct ethical system may not be possible. In essence, it may be more practical to explore what kind of ethics is more appropriate for any particular context, rather than to attempt to impose a universal code that everyone must adhere to. This issue is particularly pertinent in professional contexts, where a morally 'right' or 'wrong' action is dependent on a variety of conflicting factors – including knowledge, culture and pluralistic values – which may be in conflict with each other.

Ethics in professional contexts, otherwise known as *professional ethics*, is a subsidiary area of moral philosophy. Professional ethics is a rapidly growing discipline, which is informed by several strands of

social sciences and the law. The core focus of professional ethics is the application of a set of values that dictate ethical professional conduct and constitute 'an integral part of professional identity' (Bond, 2015: 47). The most elaborately developed type of professional ethics are *medical ethics*. This is due to the long history and ethos of the discipline of medicine, which necessitated the combination of ethical and technical issues in the training and practice of physicians.

Contributions from philosophy: Thomas Percival

The first modern code of medical ethics was crafted by the English physician Thomas Percival (1740–1804). His *Medical Ethics, or a Code of Institutes and Precepts, Adapted to the Professional Conduct of Physicians and Surgeons* was initially produced as a pamphlet in 1794, and expanded in 1803 (Waddington, 1975).

Professional codes like Percival's medical code of ethics have had an immense influence on the development of ethical standards of practice in other relevant 'helping' professions like counselling and psychotherapy (Bond, 2015). These are grounded in deeper societal values that pertain to issues of trust and confidence, power and status, even conflict of interests. As Brennan and Wildflower (2014: 432) appositely claimed, these codes have gradually created a consensus of morally acceptable behaviour that transcends professional activities and encompasses all aspects of human interactions. 'It is', they argued, 'in the nature of being a professional that one functions with a particular level of consciousness of the effect of one's behaviour' (ibid.).

Ethics in coaching

Over the last two decades, the use of coaching as a developmental tool has increased exponentially, primarily in North America, Europe and Australia, and more recently in Asia and Africa. A recent study initiated by the International Coach Federation found that coaching is a $2 billion-per-year industry employing 47,500 professionals globally, and that the number of coaching programmes and professionals entering the field is constantly on the rise (PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), 2012). This rapid success brings with it a certain degree of notoriety (Brennan and Wildflower, 2014). Unlike relevant 'helping' professions like medicine, nursing, social work or counselling and psychotherapy – all services that are subjected to the regulatory scrutiny of professional associations or

the government – coaching continues to remain largely unregulated. As a result, ethical standards of professional practice are primarily self-imposed and no coach is obliged to comply with any specific codes of ethics, if he or she does not wish to do so.

So, how do coaches make decisions when it comes to ethical issues or dilemmas? In most cases intuition, as dictated by one's value system, seems to be the coach's first port of call. Passmore (2009: 8) put it very appositely when he claimed that:

> Most coaches are in most cases ethical pluralists, who hold to a few solid principles, but for most of what they do they consider the circumstances of the situation and consider the motives and situations of the characters involved to help them reach a decision about the course of action to follow.

But are 'a few solid principles' adequate to safeguard ethical practice? Despite this unregulated landscape of coaching, or (better put) because of this landscape, the existence of a code of ethics for practice has been deemed essential (Brennan and Wildflower, 2014). This is because a code of ethics can provide a set of guidelines against which coaches and clients can measure a coach's performance and evaluate their practice for continuous development and improvement. Additionally, as coaching is still not recognised as a legitimate, stand-alone profession, a code of ethics will allow it to move away from what Grant and Cavanagh termed 'pseudo-credentialising mills' (2004: 2). Indeed, in 2008, the Global Convention on Coaching (subsequently named the Global Coaching Community – GCC), a symposium of coaching scholars and practitioners from around 40 countries, prioritised the issue of ethics as of paramount significance to the legitimisation and preservation of the coaching profession (GCC, 2008). This is not to say that coaching has been in existence with no standards of ethical practice whatsoever. Several professional coaching bodies have produced their own codes of ethical practice which coaches can adopt, should they choose to. Let's look at them.

Professional coaching associations and their codes of ethics

A code of ethics is a list of guidelines that signposts what is to be expected from a practitioner of a particular profession (Gert, 1988). In essence, it is a set of standards of conduct that dictate what is considered morally acceptable behaviour within a particular field of practice and/or organisation (Brennan and Wildflower, 2014: 431). But, before we proceed further with our discussion, we wish to be clear about terminology. In particular, we think that it is important to distinguish between the terms 'code of conduct' and 'code of ethics'. The *Collins English Dictionary*

defines a code of conduct as 'an agreement on rules of behaviour for a group or organization'; and a code of ethics as 'an agreement on ethical standards for a profession or business'. We adopt these definitions in this book and we refer to conduct as the actual behaviour; and ethics as the general guides that influence that behaviour.

When you join a professional coaching body, you agree to enter a community of practice with mutual obligations towards its members and the overall profession (Khurana and Nohria, 2008). It also means that you agree to comply with its professional and ethical standards. By extension, your membership implies that you accept to be held accountable for ethical conduct and, as a result, to be subjected to the organisation's complaints procedure, in case of breech of its code of ethics. Pursuing accreditation from such an institution, in addition to mere membership, can be an onerous process, but of course it has several benefits. This includes the opportunity to claim publicly that you operate under the aegis of one such association. It also enhances your status and credibility as a practitioner of this relatively young, emerging profession (Carlo and Prior, 2003; de Jong, 2010).

In the field of coaching, the most well-known professional associations are the:

Africa Board for Coaching, Consulting and Coaching Psychology (ABCCCP)

Association for Coaching (AC)

Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS)

European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)

International Association of Coaching (IAC)

International Coach Federation (ICF)

Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC)

Recognising the relevance of coaching in the fields of counselling and psychotherapy, several psychological professional associations have established special interest groups in coaching psychology. Some of these are the:

American Psychological Association (APA)

Australian Psychological Society (APS)

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

British Psychological Society (BPS)

Joining a professional coaching body and agreeing to comply with its professional and ethical standards is a matter of ethics. Considering the pros and the cons, what are your thoughts on the merits of joining a coaching body?

Activity

Write a list of the professional values that underpin your coaching practice. Then, go online and find the professional coaching body that you are a member of or that operates in your country. Within its website, locate their ethical code of conduct, which is usually freely available to download. Have a read through it (it's usually no more than one page long). Can you find similarities with your own professional values?

While the different professional coaching bodies operate independently from each other, if you carefully go through their 'codes of ethics' or 'codes of conduct', you will most certainly trace several similarities. These, of course, will be dictated by the societal values in the community within which you operate.

Brennan and Wildflower (2014: 431–2) conducted an expansive survey of several professional bodies' codes of ethics across various related professions. They found that there is a degree of consistency in the ethical principles that underpin professional practice, the most common of which are:

1. Do no harm: Do not cause needless injury or harm to others.
2. Duty of care: Act in ways that promote the welfare of other people.
3. Know you limits: Practise within your scope of competence.
4. Respect the interests of the client.
5. Respect the law.

If one looks at the 'code of ethics' documents of professional coaching associations like the ICF, EMCC, AC, IAC, APECS, WABC and ABCCCP, at first glance they appear quite similar. A brisk analysis of the first three, the ICF, EMCC and AC, for instance, shows that they all place great significance on a coach's qualifications and expertise, continuing professional development and supervision, respectful practice that promotes the profession, adhering to codes of ethics, confidentiality and boundary management, as well as contracting and conflicts of interest.

A more nuanced examination, however, reveals critical differences in the priorities they place on what constitutes ethical conduct. While the ICF makes it perfectly clear that sexual relationships with clients

or sponsors are frowned upon, the AC does not seem to refer to this issue. The EMCC places strong emphasis on maintaining professional responsibility, especially towards confidentiality and provision of follow-up coaching, after the termination of the coaching relationship. It is also the only body that seems to place emphasis on respecting the variety of different approaches to coaching. The ICF makes particular reference to ethical issues of further compensation for the coach through third parties that could be perceived as personal, professional or monetary benefits. It also mentions the significance of conducting and disseminating research in an ethical manner. Finally, the AC specifies the need for indemnity insurance and places particular emphasis on issues of diversity and equality that are only implicit in the other two bodies' codes of ethics.

All of the differences in both wording and emphasis between these associations are bound to cause confusion (Brennan and Wildflower, 2014). Moreover, if coaches opt for membership in more than one of these organisations, ethical dilemmas may arise as to which guidelines should take precedence (Passmore and Mortimer, 2011). To mitigate the potential risks of such inconsistencies, in 2011 the ICF and EMCC joined forces with the European Union (EU) in an attempt to produce a shared code of conduct as a benchmark for ethical practice in coaching and mentoring. This pursuit lays the groundwork for the development of self-regulation in both coaching and mentoring and, in this respect, it is registered on the dedicated EU database for self-regulated initiatives in Europe (Brennan and Wildflower, 2014: 433). A few years earlier, a group of these bodies (the ICF, AC, APECS and EMCC) commenced a process of agreeing on the First UK Statement of Shared Professional Values (Association for Coaching, 2008).

According to the agreement statement, the shared professional values are the following:

- 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.

The same statement contains the following guiding principles that underpin the First UK Statement of Shared Professional Values:

Principle One: Reputation

Every coach will act positively and in a manner that increases the public's understanding and acceptance of coaching.

Principle Two: Continuous Competence Enhancement

Every coach accepts the need to enhance their experience, knowledge, capability and competence on a continuous basis.

Principle Three: Client-Centred

Every client is creative, resourceful and whole and the coach's role is to keep the development of that client central to his/her work, ensuring all services provided are appropriate to the client's needs.

Principle Four: Confidentiality and Standards

Every coach has a professional responsibility (beyond the terms of the contract with the client) to apply high standards in their service provision and behaviour. He/she needs to be open and frank about methods and techniques used in the coaching process, maintain only appropriate records and to respect the confidentiality a) of the work with their clients and b) or their representative body's members' information.

Principle Five: Law and Diversity

Every coach will act within the laws of the jurisdictions within which they practise and will also acknowledge and promote diversity at all times.

Principle Six: Boundary Management

Every coach will recognise their own limitations of competence and the need to exercise boundary management. The client's right to terminate the coaching process will be respected at all times, as will the need to acknowledge different approaches to coaching which may be more effective for the client than their own. Every endeavour will be taken to ensure the avoidance of conflicts of interest.

Principle Seven: Personal Pledge

Every coach will undertake to abide by the above principles that will complement the principles, codes of ethics and conduct set out by their own representative body to which they adhere and by the breach of which they would be required to undergo due process.

Source: Association for Coaching (www.associationforcoaching.com).

Let us clarify here that codes of ethics cannot guarantee a solution to every ethical problem a coach is faced with in practice. Their role is to provide the catalyst for moral thinking and to function as a quality assurance mechanism (Bailey and Schwartzberg, 1995). In other words, while codes can provide the 'scaffolding' that underpins the profession (Duffy and Passmore, 2010), they cannot control it (Bond, 2015). Importantly, no unified code of ethics can alleviate the challenges of making ethical decisions. For this reason, scholars and practitioners have proposed the development of ethical decision-making frameworks as a potential avenue for making ethical decisions (see, for instance, Duffy and Passmore, 2010; Passmore and Mortimer, 2011). The word 'framework', however, can imply intellectual and practical complication, and may not be appealing to every practitioner. The nuanced idiosyncrasies of distinct communities and societies also preclude any attempt to customise and generalise ethical conduct. Echoing our colleagues' concerns regarding possible negligence when coaches do not consciously set out their ethical guidelines to clients (Passmore and Mortimer, 2011; Spence et al., 2006), we emphasise the significance of consciously exploring and reflecting on individual values and ethics and their impact on one's coaching practice.

Conclusion

Our ethical behaviour as coaches is our own responsibility. Ethical dilemmas – what van Nieuwerburgh (2014: 172) calls 'ethical moments of choice' – will inevitably arise in all aspects of our personal and professional lives. If treated appropriately, ethical dilemmas can enhance our personal and professional development. This is because they alert us to what is morally right or wrong. As a practitioner, if you catch yourself worrying over specific decisions you have to make in your practice, this is generally wonderful news. A right level of worry is indicative of your commitment to your clients and your will to provide them with a service that is right and appropriate for them. Moreover, a healthy dose of worry enables you to be humble and involved in your coaching practice and facilitates the development of your professional maturity. So don't be reluctant to open up yourself to conflict and confusion. Doing the right thing may not always feel right, and this feeling of 'wrong-ness' – what Passmore and Mortimer (2011: 212) call *cognitive dissonance*, echoing Festinger's (1957) seminal theory – can spawn further reflection, learning and development. The key to success is to maintain a conscious and recurrent ethical thinking, and to continuously reflect on your values and how they can influence the decisions that you make in your coaching practice. This will be the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter summary

- Ethical decisions involve what is morally right or wrong.
- Values are a set of personal principles that guide our behaviour and, more often than not, they clash.
- Ethics are moral principles that determine whether our actions are 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong'.
- In coaching, ethical standards of professional practice are self-imposed and no coach is obliged to comply with any specific codes of ethics.
- Several professional coaching associations have produced their own codes of ethics that have both similarities and differences in their ethical priorities.
- Codes of ethics do not ensure best practice in coaching, as they cannot guarantee a solution to every ethical problem a coach is faced with in practice.
- Constant exposure to ethical issues in practice and conscious reflection on them will help you develop your ethical maturity.

Suggestions for further reading

We hope that you will find this book helpful in your exploration of your personal, professional, even organisational values and how they interact with your coaching practice. We also acknowledge that the writing of this book not only has been grounded in other colleagues' previous work, but it is also affected by our own beliefs, principles and values as authors. We therefore recommend that you expand your horizons by reading more widely on the subject. To facilitate this process, we will offer a few relevant recommendations at the end of every chapter.

For a practical application of ethics in professional contexts, we recommend:
Banks, S. and Galagher, A. (2009) *Ethics in Professional Life*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

For a useful introduction in ethics as a subject of philosophical study, see:
Deigh, J. (2010) *An Introduction to Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

For an insightful overview of the influence of ethics in helping professions, we recommend:
Bond, T. (2015) *Standards and Ethics for Counselling in Action*, 4th edn. London: Sage Publishing.

For a brisk overview of ethics in coaching, see:
Brennan, D. and Wildflower, L. (2014) 'Ethics in coaching', in E. Cox, T. Bachkirova and D. Clutterbuck (eds), *The Complete Handbook of Coaching*, 2nd edn. London: Sage Publishing, pp. 430–44.