

The New Code of Ethics, Human Rights, and Coaching Psychology

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In our first issue of *The Coaching Psychologist*, I introduced my role and opened up this space for reflection and discussion about ethical principles in our profession (Law, 2005). I set out the following agenda for ethics in coaching psychology:

1. Developing ethical principles in coaching psychology.
2. Identifying the ethical implications for supervision of coaches and coaching psychologists.
3. Developing quality control procedures.
4. Promoting diversity in coaching.
5. Developing training in coaching psychology.
6. Embedding ethical principles as part of the core competence and continual development in our profession.

As indicated in the previous discussion, I hope in future issues we will have the opportunity to continue reporting on the development of the ethical aspects of coaching psychology to our readers. I was very much encouraged by the positive responses from many colleagues. Some suggested that we should have a regular ethics column like this as a supervisor corner. So in this article I would like to further explore some of the latest developments in our ethical thinking.

The aim of the Ethics Committee is to ensure that “its members are provided with clear and helpful parameters to guide decision making and resolve ethical dilemmas”, and it has started with a consultation on the new proposed Code of Ethics and Conduct. According to the New Code of Conduct Consultation, we still have the existing Equal Opportunities Policy Statement and Policy. The Statement indicated that “the Society is committed to the achievement of equality of opportunity as an employer and in its dealings with members...”, however, it falls short in providing a useful tool that guides its members in their practice within the legal boundaries and legislation in equality and diversity.

As psychologists, we are armed with knowledge of human emotion, thought and behaviour, we should have a lot of contributions to offer in the implementation of the new legislation such as Race Amendment Act 2000 and the harmonized process between the European Convention on Human Rights and the UK’s legislations. This has been reflected by the one-day workshop on Human Rights and Psychology held by the BPS’s annual conference this year.

As coaching psychologists, we could help shape the organisation’s cultural change such as Diversity and inspirational leadership programmes. On the other hand, the understanding of the relevant Equality, Diversity and Human Rights policies can act as a tool to guide our coaching practice and ensure that our approaches are efficient, effective and could work across diverse

culture (see EMF 2005 *MentforReview*). This article thus aims to provide some useful information on the Human Rights Act for the readers.

In contrast to many people's awareness, the Human Rights legislation is not new. It was first established following the Second World War by the Council of Europe (European Convention on Human Rights 1950) two years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which now covers 41 countries and nearly 800 million people. This indicates its wide impact and it should affect most of us and our practices.

The Human Rights Act 1998 incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) 1950 directly into UK law. It allows UK courts and tribunals to apply Convention rights directly. However, Parliament remains sovereign. Courts can strike down incompatible decisions and regulations but not legislation. Amongst many of the articles and protocols within the Convention Rights, Article 14 and Protocol 12 (which came into force on 1 April 2005) are most relevant to our legislation of discrimination laws. Article 14 states that:

"The enjoyment of any right set forth by law shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status."

Under the Equality Bill, ECHR functions include:

- Promote *public* awareness and understanding of human rights.
- Incorporate human rights values, such as privacy and dignity, in promoting good practice in public service delivery through codes of practice; including those arising from the international agreements on human rights to which the UK is a signatory (e.g. not just HRA); and including private sector bodies carrying out public functions and services.
- Conduct general inquiries into issues of public interest including human rights, to develop and promote improved practice in response to particular areas of concern. Third party interventions to provide expert knowledge and understanding, which can assist courts in making a decision.
- Provide intervention in human rights cases that would be intended to support the development of a flourishing human rights culture in the public sector.
- Provide power to support cases involving combined equality and human rights issues, including a power to support cases where equality issues fall away so that only freestanding human rights issues remain.
- Provide conciliation services in relation to disputes with both an equality and human rights issue.

Translating the above guiding light to our ethical principals in coaching psychology implies that coaching psychologists should:

- Promote *our clients'* awareness and understanding of *their rights as basic human beings*.
- Incorporate human rights values, such as privacy and dignity, in *promoting good practice in the delivery of our coaching service through codes of practice*.
- Our coaching situation might demand us to conduct professional (psychological) inquiries into issues of public interest including human rights, to develop and promote improved practice in response to particular areas of concern. To ensure that we develop competence to act as the third party intervention to provide expert knowledge and understanding which can assist courts in making a decision. For example, the BPS has a register of psychologists who *act as expert witnesses*.
- Provide intervention that would support the development of a *flourishing human rights culture* in our coaching practice within the organisation.
- Develop ability to *resolve conflicts* that could support cases involving *combined equality and human rights issues*.
- Develop our *competence to provide conciliation* services in relation to disputes with both an equality and human rights issue.

The above ethical principles are consistent with the ECHR Human Rights bill. Our next challenge is about how to translate the principles into practice. These issues will be explored further at the workshop at our first SGCP Annual National Conference this December.

At the time of writing, we are being asked to comment on the draft report written by Peter Kinderman and Frances Butler: *Creating a culture of respect for human rights: Psychological evidence on changing behaviour and attitudes – A Report for the Department for Constitutional Affairs*. The report documents detailed contributions in terms of theories and practices from applied psychologists of diverse areas, including social psychologists, clinical psychologists as well as occupational psychologists. My initial reaction is that it has not yet included coaching psychologists and the new area of positive psychology. I would of course comment on the report and welcome any contribution from the readers on these topics.

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