

Career Counselling vs Life Coaching – Differences and Similarities

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Abstract: Topicality of the research is that coaching, in general, and life coaching, particular, becomes more and more popular in the market of “helping services”. Coaching includes wide range of technics and sometimes is promoted as a unique pill that can help in solving any type of problems or situations. For some part of the society (professionals and service users) it becomes hard to identify the differences and similarities between life coaching and career counselling – in what cases what type of service might be needed and why. The aim of the study was to identify theoretical and practical differences between career counseling and life coaching. Methodology includes the following steps – theoretical research with different sources available on the topic and a small qualitative research where 4 professionals (two coaches and two career counsellors) were asked to describe their job and to point out their opinion and attitude towards the opposite part. The questions are covering their opinion on the differences and similarities between professions from professionals point and from client perspective, their opinion about education and job possibilities. The results show that at some point professionals from both parts are stereotypic about each other. Theoretical research shows that life coaching is considered to be a wider service for different situations, career counselling is a service for topics containing professional development and employment. Both services use similar methods, but coaching works only with client’s thoughts and ideas without providing them external ideas and guidance.

Keywords: adult education, life coaching, career counselling, personal development.

Introduction

Nowadays different information selling services (especially – online) gain a lot of attention. In Eastern culture coaching itself is promoted as something crucial not only for individual development, but for organizational development as well. In 2009 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) research showed that more than 500 companies (that were surveyed) are using coach services to increase performance of their workers and companies itself, for them coaching is a part of learning and development strategy (CIPD, 2009). Twelve years later, after almost two years of global pandemic coaching gained a lot more weight and importance in modern society. What happened during that period of time with career counselling? Are these two things similar or totally different? What does coaching actually mean? The author decided to get clear with this topic and create a theoretical overview of these two phenomena.

In 2020, when pandemic hit the world, and all of us were stocked at home the importance of client-oriented services grew immediately. No matter are we going to offices every day or just opening laptops we are still trying to develop our careers and trying to balance this work-life situation, which became even more complicated when our home is an office, a gym, school and a place for leisure activities at the same time. We need someone to speak about it, someone who can help us not to lose our mind.

In August 2021, while using Google search engine and typing in *career counselling* in 0.64 second we can get 87 700 000 related results which is an insane amount of information no human being can truly understand. Searching *life coaching* in 0.76 second we get 506 000 000 related results which is even more. That simple experiment shows how much more popular life coaching has become. So, it is time to get clear with what life coaching really is.

For rapid world we live in for all of us it is important to stay flexible and be able to move from one job to another in order to stay up to date with market. For those who is not so advanced even career coaching is provided (Ebner, 2021), what is this and how it is connected with coaching itself and career counselling? It is important to understand for potential clients and for professionals.

According to Henry and Karen Kimsey-House, coaching is client-oriented process in order to teach the individual to look for answers, help him to take responsibility for his own decisions and advise him during the whole process. Coaching's main idea is not to help an individual to solve any problems (problem will be solved mostly during process), but to teach an individual to move forward and develop perspective (Kimsey-House et al., 2021).

Career, according to the latest information, is the pattern of work-related experiences that span the course of a person's life (Greenhaus et al., 2019). So, career counselling is a form of professional assistance in order to get that experiences to a certain level.

To be clear, it is important to emphasize that career counselling and life coaching are provided by two different professionals with different education degrees and opportunities, with different target groups and the author of the article is not going to compare one to another in order to find what is better. Both professions exist in modern society and while working in this field it is important to realize where border crossing point between the two fields is and what interesting features, we can borrow from each other.

Each of the professions is important and is needed in different life situation, sometimes in an ideal world a person who struggles with career issues can work with both of the professionals in order to get clear with career issues (with career counsellor – get some advice about education, job etc.) and get motivated, create sustainable and reachable plan in order to achieve goals (not only about career) with coach.

People tend to engage in self and environmental exploration in order to progress in career development (and development in general), people try find some correlation with their personal traits and possible occupation or further life decisions to achieve their goals and feel overall satisfaction in life (Littman-Ovadia, 2008). It is also important how they put goals and where motivation is coming from (Muchinsky, 1983).

It is important not only to have high level of hard skills, but also work on human capital in general, for future development and for individual being employed and able to hold their job and develop. Development activities include not only education, training, skills and abilities, but also having regular supervision or an opinion from a side when it is needed (Dachner et al., 2021).

When a person is looking for any kind of professional like career counsellor, life coach or any other type of counsellor it is extremely important to choose the right one. There are different aspects that are needed to be taken into consideration – previous experience (reviews from other clients), education (not afraid to ask for a diploma, certification), participation in international organizations (that can be a guarantee of high standard service) and a wide portfolio. It is important to understand not only what type of the person stands in front of you, but also what are you expecting from service provided and are your expectations connected with reality?

For a person who's looking for help at some point it might look very similar – both professionals are speaking about development, both will help to set goal, to achieve it. Is it really a matter of name, of price or something else?

Almost for two years the world is coping with COVID 19 pandemic and it has a massive impact on the whole "field of helping professions" – not only all of them moved online, but also a lot of people are struggling with a job loss, identity loss and a need to be flexible. Some of them are looking to get professional help. At that point COVID 19 crisis and the whole situation of turbulence in employment makes it one of the best times for professional to gain new clients and for individuals to experience totally new and unexpected career growth (Huo, 2021).

Nevertheless, the pandemic will end at some point, but a lot of new professionals and individuals who became life coaches and career counsellors will remain in the field. Individual can't become a career counsellor in a short period of time, in order to call yourself one, an individual needs to obtain a degree. It depends on a country, but it is only a master's degree in Latvia and in few places (for October 2021 – 3 masters programmes in Latvia and 3 programmes for teachers to achieve qualification "teacher – career counsellor") (Nacionālā izglītības..., 2021) Getting evolved into classical form of education gives some understandable structure and procedures that future

professional is going through. Of course, it doesn't mean that getting a degree automatically makes you a good professional, but it gives hope.

According to life coaching, there are many educational opportunities and it is important to choose wisely. The best way possible is to check out International Coaching Federation web page that shows licensed programmes. For October 2021 there were 10 schools (organizations) that provide an opportunity to become a life coach (ICF, 2021).

How does it affect professionals? Probably, you can't become a properly trained professional in a few weeks... Does it come with two-year-long education? No guarantees at all. People of different background choose to work in that field. Life coaching is quite a new area, but already in 2007 coaching industry was booming at the time and it was very prestigious to have personal coach (Kessel, 2007). nowadays it is still booming, but in a new way and even more rapidly.

Coaching started in counselling and still uses counselling methods – basic methods of creating trustful relationships, interviewing, curiosity (as method), powerful questions, creating motivation etc. (Skerten et al. 2006). Coaching in general and life coaching as a part of it might be considered as a “little brother” that developed into big, independent personality.

The aim of the article is to describe theoretical and practical differences between career counselling and life coaching in order to gain perspective on these two different helping professions.

Methodology

The research question was what the differences and similarities between life coaching and career counselling are. First, the monographic method has been used to provide this study. Available literature (printed and online versions) about career, career counselling, coaching and life coaching were used. The author used sources in Latvian and English. Previous research in the field related to the theme of article was used.

In addition, in the middle of 2021, qualitative empirical research was carried out – two career counsellors (private practices) and two coaches were asked to answer a few questions about their fields:

1. What is your job's main goal?
2. What do you know about career counselling/life coaching?
3. Do you consider it as partly similar fields?
4. What are the main differences in these two fields?

Answers were recorded on tape and then decoded into text; pieces of the short interview (each around 30 minutes) are shown in the article.

Results and Discussion

To start with discussion, it is important to realize what we understand by the term “life coaching” and “career counselling”. Life coach works with their clients to help them to achieve goals, overcome obstacles, and make changes or shifts in their lives (Richards, 2020). According to Savickas, career counselor can provide “a safe space from which clients can seek growth and exploratory experiences” (Savickas, 2002). It seems quite similar and connected. What is the difference?

Shortened version, might be that life coach doesn't have any specific qualification, but is respectful, tolerant, and ready to cooperate in any sphere, but career counselor focuses on employment, career and job topics. Being involved in career counselling field we know that according to Donald Super career development includes not only education, occupational preferences and competencies, but also includes individual's life situations, all changes that comes with time and experience (Super et al., 1996).

According to Latvia's labor market career counselling has its own place in national job classification system and career counsellor has two places – career counsellor in education (aka teacher career counsellor) and career counsellor that corresponds to human resource field. Coach (that can be related to any type of coach) is called promoter of growth or development (in communication people still use coach in Latvian) (Labklājības ministrija, 2021).

In the empirical part of the research 4 professionals took part – 2 career counsellors (both women – 36 and 42 years old, both have multiple jobs and career counselling is a part of it, both have master's degree in career counselling, both more than 4 years of practice in career counselling). Two life coaches took part in the survey – man (37) and woman (32), the man has International coaching federation certification as ACC (Associate Certified Coach) professional, the woman has started her journey recently and is recently accepted by ICF. The man has more than 6 years of experience and the woman 1 + years of experience.

All of the participants were asked the same questions (3 interviews were held in Latvian and one interview (woman, 32, life coach), were held in Russian. you can see some quotes of the interviews translated by the author in this article

First question. What is your job's main goal? Career counsellor (36) answered following: *“Mostly my clients are pupils in their last grades or youngsters in general, they don't know how to move forward from school to adult world, how to choose profession. So, probably, my job's main goal is to help youngsters realize what they can do in life and where to work”*. The second career's counsellor answer was quite short: *“My job's goal is to help people find and hold the job they want and like even if they are employed at the moment of our cooperation”*.

That sounds really appropriate to the idea of career counselling and emphasizes that career counselling's main topic is employment. Both of the career counsellors were asked to express their attitude towards D.Super's idea that career is not only about employment, but also about the whole life in general and, maybe, career counsellor should work widely with person – not only mentioning employment. Both of the respondents answered quite similar – *“Career counsellor is not a therapist or psychologist. We don't have skills to solve complicated personal problems. We only can advise to find another service if it is needed”*.

Then both were asked *“What they know about life coaching?”*. Career counsellor (36) answered, that knows this field and even tried to get educated in it, but it doesn't seem *“professional”* to her. *“Life coaching is a modern thing now. Everyone is some kind of coach nowadays, but how you can help other people when you are not trained properly? I consider that there might be good specialist in that field, but you should choose very wisely, because education and professional training of any specialist is the key”*. Another career counsellor (42) mentioned that she knows about the field of helping professions but hasn't any experience in that. *“It is a new thing on our market, but I am not sure that people are ready to pay big money for nothing”*.

Both career counsellors considered that there is nothing similar in these two professions except that both are from *“field of helping professions”*. Answering the last question *“What are the differences in these two fields?”* both of the career counsellor answered that these are two different professions and people in them do totally different things.

Life coaches have a quite different view on this topic – answering the first questions *“What is your job's main goal?”* first life coach (man, 37) told that *“the main goal is to help client find answers, but not answer for him. Coaching is about guiding clients to achieve whatever he wants to achieve, to create atmosphere that motivates and help to move forward”*. The second one (woman, 32) defined her job's goal as *“help client realize his potential and use it to the fullest”*.

Both life coaches knew what career counselling is and both mentioned, that it is a sphere of consulting that specialized on certain topic (employment, job searching), but life coaching includes everything that client wants to cover.

According to the third question about similarities in both professions life coach (man, 37) answered that *“of course, there are some similarities, because we both work with client's needs, but, I guess, a coach focuses more on resources and how to activate said client, but career counselling is more specific. It is important to realize that coaching is not counselling in any form”*. Woman (32) answered that there might be few similarities, but she is not so informed about career counselling specific, she considers that anyone who works with people should try coaching methods and competencies in their work, because it might open clients in totally different light.

Answering the last question about differences both life coaches answered that the main idea that people should understand that coaching is not counselling. Coach won't give you advice, won't help you, he will follow your plan of development, will accept everything you want to achieve and will create that atmosphere of motivation and acceptance.

Analysing the results of the interview the author created Table 1 that shows a short summary of the received answers plus represents average price of an hour of work of career counsellor and life coach in Latvia (brief search through information on different professionals' website, for October 2021).

So, what there is in common in both professions? Definitely, both they are from group of "helping" professions, but they consider helping in different way. Life coach insist on theory that clients has all answers already inside and coach should help find the way to the answers, client create goal, plan to achieve goal, but coach has relatively passive role – watching over, motivating, but not controlling and pushing forward – it is always clients need and ability to do or not to do.

Career counselling is more concrete and focused on certain topic related to job searching, creating, holding and all different activities that could be done thought working and being employed. Of course, it consists of preparing as well (getting proper education, additional training etc.) and here career counsellor should be very concrete, but still final decision always will be done by client.

The author consider one of the main differences between career counselling and life coaching that in coaching professional is kind of a supervisor for the client, he is following his path, but is not active in it, he is asking questions in order to help the client find the right insight that will help to bring out the needs, goals and ways how to achieve it.

Life coach can work with client who has some employment related question not being deeply educated in this topic just because life coach is accepting everything client brings out in the sessions and in what area of life he wants to achieve the balance.

Life coaching might be a very useful tool to increase personal insight and to shape and reinforce desired behaviour and actions (Ammentrop et al., 2019).

Table 3

Life coaching vs Career counselling

Indicators	Life coaching	Career counselling
Education	Courses + ICF accreditation	University degree
Main idea – philosophy	Help individual realize his potential and resources and use it to the fullest	Help individual to develop their career related skills and use them in order to develop and improve career path
Average price of an hour (for Latvia)	Starting from 70 EUR per hour (usually, coaches sell pack of session (5, 7, 10 or different))	Around 50 EUR per hour
Similar ideas	Helping individuals (in different way), creating trustful relationships, motivation.	
Different ideas	Covers all different field of life. Doesn't help to solve or give advice, help client to find answers and way himself.	Focuses on employment and job field in general.

There are aspects of life coaching that might be very useful in client-oriented work (like career counselling, teaching, consulting in general).

According to International Coaching Federation coach should be fluent in eleven professional competencies (which includes 48 markers) covering such topics as – working according to ethical codecs, creating coaching agreement with client, creating trust and intimacy, coaching presence, active listening, powerful questioning, direct communication, creating awareness, designing actions, planning and goal setting, and managing progress and accountability (ICF Professional Certified..., 2014).

National Career Development Association (NCDA) has it owns Code of Ethics (2015), which includes different categories that career counsellor should be working by. It covers professional relationships;

relationships with other professionals; confidentiality, privileged communication, and privacy; professional responsibility; providing career services online, technology, and social media and others (NCDA, 2015).

Both of the codes have some similarities, ICF code has wide range of markers and standards how coach should act and how not, it may give big wider perspective for client looking for a professional – what kind of professional he is going to look for. They both include basic things that every client expects – safety, intimacy, respect and acceptance. In rapidly changing world it is basic ethics needs that must be covered (Alsaad, 2021).

According to Kim Richards, certified life coach, “It is an incredible privilege and honour to have the opportunity to support a client in an intimate relationship of digging deep to determine and manifest their life desires” (Richards, 2020). At the end of the day it is the most important thing, what value our service brings into client’s life – it doesn’t matter how we call ourselves, how much we earn and what our background is. The most important thing is that we create save environment, we make client feel worthless, unique and important, a person who can make a change.

Conclusions

In situation when the market is full of different professionals providing their services it is extremely important for potential client to understand what the service means and what they should expect. For professionals it is also important to be aware of different services that are out at the market to make sure their clients get the best one.

- Life coaching and career counselling are two different professions with some similarities and features that both need to use.
- Life coaching started from counselling itself and still uses the methods of counselling.
- Life coaches tended to consider career counselling as a small field. Life coaches consider that career issues can be solved during coach sessions.
- Career counsellors tend to underrate life coaches mentioning that one persona can’t be a supervisor in solving different type of issues.
- There might be an issue in the field of education – it is more than clear how to get career counsellor education and qualification, but for life coach there is no programmes in academic field. All available opportunities for education are different courses, so a potential life coach should be aware of what he is choosing.
- In some cases a client can solve the same issue with career counsellor and with life coach at the same time.
- Career counselling and coaching have similar ethics standards and are supposed to bring high level of service for clients.

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