

# The value of asking philosophical questions: Integrating existentialism into career coaching

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## Abstract

This article explores the value of career coaches asking philosophical questions, specifically relating to existentialism, in order to enhance clients' self-awareness, goal-setting, and decision-making. It makes a theoretical argument for integrating existential concepts, such as authenticity and essence, into a coach's toolkit to help stimulate, challenge, and shift forwards a client's thinking when faced with difficult career-related questions. Existentialism's value is explored in relation to three established career coaching models – the GROW model, the OSKAR model, and the Skilled Helper model.

**Key words:** Philosophy; existentialism; career coaching

## Introduction

*Know thyself.* This famous saying, attributed to Socrates, reflects the view that in order to make the best decisions about our lives and understand the world around us, we need to first have a good understanding of ourselves. Knowing ourselves – our character, our nature, our limitations – is, Socrates claimed, the beginning of wisdom. If we haven't explored ourselves, our values, our beliefs, our purpose, our place in and understanding

of the world, how can we expect to make fully informed decisions about the potentially transformational elements of our lives, such as our careers?

In this article, it will be argued that philosophy as a tool to aid career coaching can be integrated into elements of different career coaching models and, in doing so, can help clients to make better informed decisions. There will be a discussion of one branch of philosophy - existentialism - as an example, and an attempt to demonstrate how existential concepts and attitudes align with the core questions that are at the heart of three career coaching models, with a view to arguing that if it can be relevant in this case, then there is potential in other areas too.

There may be many areas of philosophy that can contribute to the field of career coaching, including, but not limited to: value theory, meta-ethics, normative ethics, practical ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, personal identity, rationality, feminism, free will and determinism, metaphysics of mind, and more. There has been much work already in this space, highlighting different ways in which philosophical beliefs underpin and relate to career theories and choices, and a few examples will be touched on here.

Lush explored the relevance of moral philosophy to careers work, examining career practice from the perspective of three different theories of the good (Lush, 2018). Lush argues that careers work is a kind of moral philosophy and that ideas of the good, whilst fundamental to the work that coaches do, are under examined within the careers space. Winter discusses meaninglessness as a philosophical concept, the different elements that may comprise it, and the distinction between what makes actions valuable or meaningful (Winter, 2011). He argues for the relevance of reflecting on these definitions and distinctions when considering our work-related activities. Law argues that philosophy 'addresses issues at the heart of careers work' (Law, 2011, p2) and talks about the need for *why*-questioning, particularly 'when we're trying to position ourselves in the minds of other people' (p1). Affording ourselves the opportunity for self-interrogation, he argues, and considering the process by which we do this, helps us to consider why something might be a good idea. In his book *How to Find Fulfilling Work*, Krznaric (2012) discusses the 'existential hunger' (p7) that was common across the people he met from over a dozen countries whilst doing his research, and the longing that these people had for a job that provides meaning and fulfilment, not just a paycheck. He explores the challenges that this presents both in understanding what fulfilment is, and how to achieve it. This article will argue for the integration of existentialism as a valuable tool for career coaches to employ when approaching these *why*-questions of meaning, purpose, fulfilment, and the good, in order to encourage and stimulate self-interrogation in their clients.

Career coaching is a process aimed at helping a person change in a way they wish, and helping them to find, and go towards, a direction they want to go (AGCAS, 2023). It involves recognizing client's behaviours, attitudes, intentions, values and beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This article will argue that the integration of philosophy into the career coaching space aligns with, and can add value to, the attempt to help clients shift position in a meaningful way, through better consideration and understanding of their own intentions, values and beliefs.

Some of the most powerful questions that a career coach can ask (Forbes, 2018) are fundamentally philosophical, and can be related to different elements of existentialism, for example: What is the most important thing in the world to you, and why? What do

you need most right now? What do you want? What does success look like? Many of the benefits to working with a career coach, including gaining clarity, insight, harmony, fulfilment and thriving (Kauffeld et al., 2022) require a level of engagement with philosophical thinking. Existentialism, when integrated into other areas of coaching, therapy and counselling, is done so with a view to address these powerful questions, and aligns to the aims of career coaching.

The article is divided into five sections. Following on from this introduction, there is a brief introduction of existentialism as a branch of philosophy and some of its main tenets. The next section highlights some examples of the existing integration of existentialism in related fields. Following this, three established career coaching models will be addressed, and it will be illustrated where and how use of existential notions could be integrated into, and thus contribute to, the effective delivery of these. After this, there will be a brief summary of some conclusions drawn.

This article is not endorsing existentialism as a philosophical theory or attempting to make the case that it is in any way *correct* (there are many critiques of existentialist viewpoints from many fields), nor that career coaches should present the existential attitude as the *right way* or only way to approach client's career-thinking. It is merely attempting to establish a theoretical argument for its integration into three career coaching models, and its subsequent value as an additional tool to help stimulate, challenge and shift forwards a client's thinking when faced with difficult career questions.

## What is existentialism?

Existentialism is a broad term that defies easy definition. It was not until the 1940s, with Jean-Paul Sartre, that someone explicitly identified as an 'Existentialist.' However, if we delve into history, we can identify a lineage of philosophers who could be considered existentialists in some form or other, including luminaries such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Jaspers.

We must, therefore, be careful when trying to give a precise definition of what existentialism is. As Baggini points out, it "can be misleading to generalize too much about what 'existentialists' have to say about life's meaning, since those thinkers labelled as existentialist differed enormously in their beliefs" (Baggini, 2004, p10). Therefore, it might be more appropriate to best characterize existentialism as an attitude.

This existential attitude could be framed as a broad method of enquiry into how one should live one's life and attempt to find meaning. It could be seen as a reactive position, one that rejects the notions of science and pure rationality as being able to offer complete explanations of human life. The idea of the *human condition* is key to existentialism and suggests that there is something about being human that is shared and that cannot be reduced to, or explained by, physicalism or dualism, for example.

Existentialism challenges the idea that we should attempt to divorce our thinking from ourselves and our experiences. This is a reaction to pre-existing enlightenment philosophies, focused on reason and the scientific method. The dualistic thinking of Descartes, the attempt at pure rationality from Kant, and even the metaphysical claims of Plato, all represent the kind of thinking against which existentialism can be cast.

Existentialism suggests that thinking is never purely, objectively rational, or somehow an activity performed separately from one's own existence. As Feuerbach claims, do not 'wish to be a philosopher in contrast to being a man [*sic*]...do not think as a thinker...think as a living, real being...think in existence' (Tillich, 1944, p.54).

The existentialist does much work simply trying to unravel, dissect and analyse the nature of human experience. Rather than relying on traditional, purely rational arguments to bolster their viewpoints, they draw strength from the commonality of human experiences. Thus, existentialism can be characterised by its quest to understand what a human being is; its attempt to try and unearth and understand many of the shared features of the human condition. The notion of authenticity is central to existential thinking, as is the idea that philosophy is not a disinterested activity that latches on to whatever may appear firm or familiar, but a deeply personal quest for meaning, where individuals navigate the labyrinth of existence in search of their own truths.

## Where can we find examples of the integration of existentialism in fields related to career coaching?

In order to support the argument for existentialism as a useful tool in career coaching, this section will briefly highlight some of the ways in which existentialism, or the existential attitude, have been integrated into other forms of coaching, therapy, and counselling. There is clear precedent for integrating existentialism into a range of fields adjacent to career coaching, including leadership coaching, executive coaching, psychotherapy, therapy, counselling, stress management, and coaching more broadly, and there is a body of literature to support this.

A figure that has written widely on the value of integrating existentialism into a range of fields is Emmy van Deurzen, the founder of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC), at which it is possible to study an MA in Existential Coaching. Existential coaching there is defined as 'a uniquely philosophical and deeply relational way of examining the paradoxes and challenges of human existence so as to empower clients to move forward in an authentic and reflective way' (NSPC, 2023). Existential coaches encourage clients to explore a range of existential concepts, such as 'meaning, authenticity, freedom, choice and responsibility' (NSPC, 2023), all of which can be effectively integrated into career coaching models.

van Deurzen (1998) acknowledges the validity and importance of psychotherapists asking questions relating to the dilemmas of human life such as safety versus adventure, and confidence versus humility. In counselling and therapy, she also suggests that taking an existential approach 'involves assisting people to come to terms with the dilemmas of living', acknowledging that 'few people are lucky enough to find a professional who can help them sort out these issues' (van Deurzen, 2001, p13) highlighting the importance of coaches offering this type of approach where possible for anyone experiencing relevant dilemmas of living.

The models for career coaching addressed here all involve some form of goal or aim setting, and van Deurzen argues for this as a benefit of an existential approach to counselling, suggesting that making 'commitments in action and communicating with other people are also considered as part of the progress that people will make towards

the creation of a fulfilling life' (van Deurzen, 2001, p14) but what clients need is 'some assistance in surveying the terrain and in deciding on the right route so that they can again find their way' (p18).

Whitham comments on existential coaching from an executive coaching viewpoint and states that although she does not 'see an existential approach as covering all necessary aspects of coaching, I do see it...can be used in conjunction with other tools to provide what the coachee needs' (Whitman, 2013, p98). She actively supports the idea of offering an existential perspective to a wide audience as 'some ideas and thinking which coaches from all backgrounds can consider and potentially add to their tool kits' (p98).

Kongsted Krum (2012) argues that the existential approach is beneficial for coaching people with work-related stress. She mentions that findings suggest 'that existential coaching can be a way of reducing stress by helping clients understand that openness to experience is a way of gaining insight into their need for control' (Kongsted Krum, 2012, p57). She refers to work by Spinelli and Horner (2008) in which an argument is made for the existential approach as suitable for coaching more broadly, and not just in the counselling and psychotherapy settings. She defines stress as 'a reaction to being under pressure for changing a way of being and...resisting this change because of fear of what may happen' (Kongsted Krum, 2012, p69) and then argues that the coaching relationship in the context of applying an existential approach can be understood as 'a way of teaching the coaching client an existential attitude of openness to experience that will be a possible way of gaining insight into their own worldview and thus being able to make decisions based on this knowledge and awareness' (p69).

Langdridge (2012) argues for the adoption of existentialism and a phenomenological approach within coaching as a modification of the existential therapeutic approach. He argues that the 'key to successful working as a coach is a phenomenological attitude, the use of ideas from existentialism as a heuristic and the steady move towards a goal and solution focussed mode of practice' (Langdridge, 2012, p88). This approach will help the coach get a better sense of the client's strengths and weaknesses, and thus how they 'may be marshalled to achieve the stated goal/s' (p87) they have agreed upon. He argues that the coach's desire and ability to understand the client's worldview is key to their effectiveness, and gaining an insight into a client's concerns regarding choice-making, their own perceived sense of freedom and anxiety, and their ability to make meaning for themselves, is key to the success of their work. Combining this phenomenological approach with a solutions-focussed model, Langdridge argues, will enable a coach to help their clients explore, set and move towards a goal.

In relation to Authentic Leadership Coaching, Fusco et al. (2015) argue that an existential approach creates 'an opportunity for leaders to wonder and take stock of their lives and their leadership, in a way far deeper than is usually permissible in most leadership development interventions' (Fusco et al., 2015, p69). They argue that confronting a client's existing views by considering existential concepts within their coaching can go far beyond other approaches to leadership development and 'have a profound impact on those involved as they contemplate the significant matters of their existence, including their: beliefs, values, meaning, freedom and finitude' (Fusco et al., 2015, p62). They also mention other different forms and applications of coaching in which there has already been work done to argue for the integration of existential ideas, including Neuro-linguistic

Programming (Reed, 2012), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Mirea, 2012), and Mindfulness (Nanda, 2012). When discussing existential coaching more generally, they list the things that a client may expect, including clarity on who they are and what they want from life, exploration of meaningful ways in which to engage their life, and overall 'a better sense of who they are, what they want to become and the kind of life they want to live' (Fusco et al., 2015, p64).

Finally, Jacob (2019) argues that existential coaching helps clients with consideration of 'eternal human questions that we all (some more, some less often) sense at a deeper level in our day-to-day lives. Questions like: How can I be happier? What is the meaning of (my) life? How can I be authentic?' (Jacob, 2019, p2). Jacob argues that these questions are often central to the challenges that clients bring coaches and relate to inescapable elements of the human condition that affect us all, like death, attachment and meaning. As Hanaway mentions in the foreword, 'we live in uncertain times, and we need to find a way to meet that uncertainty in a celebratory way. This lies at the heart of an existential approach' (Jacob, 2019, p22).

Given these different existing approaches of integrating existentialism into related fields, there is scope for its integration into career coaching. This clear precedent supports the claim that elements of existentialism and the existential attitude align with the aims of coaching and counselling more broadly, and that there is crossover with certain aims of career coaching too. Drawing from the applications listed above, the value of integrating existentialism into career coaching will to some degree relate to whether or not the process may help clients to:

- address eternal human questions,
- take stock of their lives,
- consider what they want and how to meaningfully engage in their life,
- gain a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses,
- develop their perception of their freedom and anxiety,
- develop an openness to new experiences,
- explore their sense of responsibility and authenticity,
- make commitments and communicate these effectively in order to build a fulfilling life.

The next section will aim to demonstrate is that these are all, to some degree, part of a career coach's work.

## Where and how could asking philosophical questions, specifically related to existentialism, add value to career coaching?

In order to demonstrate existentialism's value to career coaching, this section will address three established career coaching models - the GROW model, the OSKAR model, and the Skilled Helper Model - and consider a potential avenue for a career coach to integrate philosophy, specifically existentialism, into their practice due to its relevance to the aims of specific elements of each model.

## The GROW model

The GROW model (Whitmore, 2009), initially developed by Alexander Graham and popularised by Sir John Whitmore, focuses on helping the client to identify their goals and then move from these, through considerations around reality and available options, towards action planning. Step 1 of the GROW Model – What are your Goals? – aims to identify and clarify a goal that the client wishes to pursue. Reaching this level of understanding effectively, may well involve a directed discussion around ultimate goals, performance goals and progress goals. Helping the client to reflect on their principal aims and aspirations in order to identify those they may wish to action more immediately is involved in this stage of the GROW model. Reflection on ultimate goals and how to formulate them is rare. Here existentialism can offer a valuable tool for insight.

Understanding our ultimate goals as individuals involves asking ultimate questions. Ultimate questions 'are questions about purpose and existence' (RE:ONLINE, 2023) such as: Why am I here? What is my purpose? How should I live my life? And these types of questions are commonplace in many areas of philosophy. When coaching clients on how best to make career decisions, formulate goals, and choose pathways, these ultimate questions underpin any answers that they might give in relation to their aims and aspirations. Considering these questions is important if our clients are to make informed choices about their careers – these eternal human questions affect us all to some degree. If they have not considered what they view as their purpose, or reason for being, how well can they truly make decisions about what career path to take, or job offer to accept?

These types of questions are more effective because they "are 'open', that is they do not imply a correct or expected answer or encourage a minimal response" according to Ali & Graham (1996, p74). They argue that these 'how' and 'what' questions also help because they open up the type of response that can be offered and remove a sense of judgement from the client. Removing the pressure of an expected 'right' answer can help to encourage the client to be more forthcoming in their answers/engagement and help with the balance of control in the discussion – skilful questioning is 'essential to the creation of an empathic relationship' (p78).

As career coaches, understanding the value and context of these types of questions is important if we are to help our clients figure out their goals, as is finding effective ways to ask them, and in both cases, integrating existentialism can act as a useful tool. Here, existentialism is a natural bedfellow because a primary focus of existentialism is ultimate questions concerning the nature of being and the meaning of life. The fundamental question of what it means to *be* is at the heart of existentialism, and at the heart of all that we do, not only within careers coaching – as Heidegger points out, 'the question touched upon here is hardly an arbitrary one' (2010, p1). He argues that this question is integral to our lives. We all *are* in a world that *is*, but have little understanding of what either of these things mean. Considering what it means to *be* is important if we are to have meaningful insight into how we ought to earn our money, invest our time, or find causes to support/believe in. Ultimate questions are at the heart of existentialism, and these considerations from Heidegger could frame an effective line of questioning when trying to begin a discussion around aims, goals and purpose.

Heidegger is particularly interested in being in the human sense, rather than tables or trees for example, and refers to this as *dasein* (Heidegger, 2010) – the human being's kind of

being. The question about the nature of *dasein*, or what it is to be human, is relevant when considering what goals we may hold. We must consider what it means to be human in order to be equipped to explore our aims and aspirations.

This question of what is a human being's kind of being could be explored by a client or coach from many different angles, including religious, sociological, biological, and philosophical, to name but a few. As one line of questioning to a client who is struggling with identifying their goals or purpose, a coach could try to provoke reflection and challenge, by exploring the existential attitude here. Existentialism suggests that we can only attempt to understand our existence by drawing from our existence, not by appealing to anything outside of it. We are human beings, so we must be able to gain some sense of what it means to be human by examining our own experiences. This descriptive aim could help to stimulate thought and reflection on the part of the client, by asking: What does being human mean to you? Given your answer, how do you think that you could do it better? What goals can we establish here related to your career?

Providing this viewpoint skilfully through directed questioning could act as a stimulus to get the client thinking about what it means for them to be a human being and how this may impact their goals and, in turn, choices around their careers and transitions. In addition, given what can often be the subjective nature of career-decision making, integrating this individual focus on what it means to be a human will demand clients ask questions of themselves and encourage self-reflection.

### The OSKAR model

One of the ideas at the heart of the OSKAR solutions-focused model is for the coach to help the client 'to be as clear as possible about what's wanted' (Jackson and McKergow, 2006, p1). When engaging in the initial outcomes section of the model, the coach is trying to help the client establish what vision of the future that they want. This may mean asking: What does success look like to you? What is the end goal that you are hoping for? Using tools to help challenge the client to understand better what these are will aid with the client's ability to scale themselves in relation to the outcomes too. Understanding what they wish to accomplish today, and what they hope to achieve in the long term, can require some carefully directed questioning from the coach because clients often do not know exactly what they hope to achieve and can struggle with a lack of self-awareness in this regard. If the career coach is trying to help the client set a desired outcome, and explore what they hope to accomplish in the long term, then employing existential concepts as questioning tools are relevant and applicable to this process.

The notion of essence is one that is used in different existentialists' writing and could be integrated as a relevant tool when using questioning to encourage self-awareness, open-mindedness and understanding of what we want. Sartre uses the illustration of a paper-cutter in order to help explain the idea of essence - 'here is an object which has been made by an artisan whose inspiration came from a concept... the paper-cutter is at once an object produced in a certain way and, on the other hand, one having a specific use' (Sartre, 1987, p13). The essence of an object in Sartre's eyes is its nature, its purpose, its goal. With the paper-cutter example we can see that its essence precedes its existence; the way that the paper-cutter exists is determined and shaped by its given nature and purpose. It has a fixed path and fulfils a certain function. Sartre calls this kind of being a being-in-itself.

Conversely, a *being-for-itself* is a being whose existence precedes its essence; the being has no given nature or purpose. A *being-for-itself* is free to create its own essence. It is condemned to be free, to paraphrase Sartre, because it has not been created for any specific purpose, nor by any craftsman. Sartre classes human beings in this category; we are each the authors of our own lives. The mistake that Sartre believes many of us to have made is the assumption that our essence precedes our existence – ‘if existence really does precede essence, man [sic] is responsible for what he is. Thus, existentialism’s first move is to make every man [sic] aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him’ (Sartre, 1987, p16). And so, as Baggini explains, Sartre argues that we are not like paper-cutters, but more ‘like the pieces of flint that just are. We may find uses for ourselves and others, but these purposes do not derive from our essential nature’ (Baggini, 2004, p11).

This leaves us with the potentially scary thought that perhaps our lives have no given meaning, perhaps we are without innate purpose or goal. This area poses a challenge to the career coach in how to skilfully work with a client in this space of unease. Here, it highlights the importance of contracting and setting out clearly the fact that the coach will be taking this kind of existential approach whilst agreeing a shared pathway forwards for a session. Ali and Graham (1996) argue for the use of contracting as part of the initial exploration phase with a client as a way to set boundaries, be clear about what expectations are, and build trust as part of a working relationship. The adviser ‘should be quite specific in spelling out the agreement and what will be worked on over the time of the interview’ (Ali and Graham, 1996, p50) which leads to clients taking ownership over the contract. When integrating existentialism into a session, this spelling out of the agreement would include making the client aware of the potential for this, and doing this from the start - as well as stating it in the booking details prior to the session - would help to address the ethical concerns. It is worth noting here too that coaches that can artfully bring a client into a space of anxiety and take time to address its ontological nature from an existentialist perspective, Langdrige (2012) argues, rather than exacerbating a problem, can help a client address these complex emotions in a meaningful way.

However, Hanaway acknowledges that this overt approach to existential coaching may put some people off because ‘many people carry negative assumptions about the nature of existential thought’ (Jacob, 2019, p24). There is work to be done here by a skilled coach to ensure the trust and feelings of safety within the client-coach relationship are maintained by clearly articulating what an existential approach might involve, as well as meeting these feelings of uncertainty in a positive manner. This method of coaching may not be suitable for all clients due to the challenging questions and feelings that it may invoke, which supports the recommendation of existentialism as an addition to a career coach’s toolkit, to be utilised when appropriate within an existing coaching model.

According to Sartre, *Bad faith* is the position we find ourselves in if we pretend, even in the face of a lack of meaning, that how we ought to live our lives is not our choice (Sartre, 1987). This involves conforming to another’s or your own values without completely freely and consciously willing them as your own - something that many of us do as a matter of routine, and often do not take the time to question. Career goals and choices may be seen by clients as handed to them in some form, or that there is a degree of flexibility but only within certain parameters which are deemed as out of their control. Expectations placed upon clients simply because of a certain group of conditions linked to who they are - e.g.

parents, upbringing, and culture - play a role in decision-making either consciously or unconsciously. Law's (1993) comments on the importance of recognising the 'affective, changing, multi-layered and unique experience of each student and client' (Law, 1993, p299) if a coach is to offer help and enable self-direction are relevant here, and it is important to recognise the differences that clients bring with them to sessions. Using a line of questioning that explores the idea of essence and, subsequently, what they think about the possibility of acting in *bad faith*, aligns well with the aim of trying to get clients to think positively about what they feel responsible for in their lives, what outcomes they are really aiming for, and why they are willing them.

Another fruitful area for exploration that aligns well when considering outcomes with a client could be what Sartre refers to as the *human condition*. By condition he is referring to 'the necessity for him [*sic*] to exist in the world, to be at work there, to be there in the midst of other people, and to be mortal there' (Sartre, 1987, p38). Here Sartre is arguing that although humans do not have a common goal or purpose, we do have common elements to our experience which can influence our conscious thinking when forming our own meaning for our lives.

Considering what are the positive elements of a client's experience as a human being could be a productive way to begin the solutions-focused approach that the OSKAR model promotes. This means asking: What elements of the human experience bring you meaning and a sense of purpose? It is here that the solutions may start to be considered if, in the previous line of questioning, they do not find an innate sense of purpose given to them.

### The Skilled Helper model

Within Egan's Skilled Helper Model, there are three recognised stages in career coaching: Exploration, Challenge, and Action-Planning (Egan, 2002). In the exploration stage, the coach uses focused and directed questioning to establish what is going on in the client's current situation and their outlook/views on this. In the challenging stage, coaches encourage clients to look at something from another perspective, and consider how things might look from another point of view. In both of these stages, there are key existential concepts that align and are worthy of integration as part of a philosophical approach to the questioning used by the coach.

Whilst in the exploration stage with a client, directing questions in order to establish the client's own sense of authenticity could be very insightful in order to gain an understanding of how they view their current situation and how much agency they take over the position they are in. The skilled helper enables their client by 'helping them accept their responsibility for becoming a more effective person and helping them to develop their own inner resources' (Nelson, 2007, p2). Questioning the client, therefore, on the issue of the authenticity of their actions - and linking to the issue of *bad faith* as mentioned before - aligns with the aim of helping them to see how they may/may not be accepting responsibility for their actions and who they are.

Thoreau touches upon the idea of authenticity in his book *Walden*, not least when he says that he 'wished to live deliberately' (Thoreau, 2021, p43). This idea of living deliberately, of not simply acting out of conformity or making choices without owned intention, is at the heart of the notion of living an authentic life. As Jacob (2019) argues, these questions around ownership over our own lives are often central to the challenges that clients bring

coaches and relate to inescapable elements of the human condition that affect us all. As such, asking clients questions about the deliberate nature of their choices thus far, or which parts of their current situation they feel were authentically chosen by them, and their corresponding sense of responsibility for their own lives, aligns with the aim of exploring their lives.

Authenticity is a key concept within existentialism and a value that many existentialists promote, hence its appearance in other existential coaching approaches taken, such as van Deurzen (NSPC, 2023). Being authentic involves consciously willing one's own actions and not becoming a victim of *bad faith* – we should not deny 'the possibility of action which really exists' (Kalderimis, 2010, p85). Heidegger describes authenticity using his previous term *dasein* in the sense of being-mine. When *dasein* is authentic then it 'belongs to itself' (Heidegger, 2010, p42). Inauthenticity is to lose or only 'apparently' win oneself. We may do this by denying our possibilities or by being in such a way that is not our own. Entering this concept of authenticity into a discussion as a Skilled Helper aligns with the aim of opening up a client's understanding of themselves, the situation they are in, and the options they feel are available to them.

Authenticity, as standing up for and standing behind what one does, and as owning and owning up to one's deeds as an agent in the world, can also provide a source of meaning and purpose. Meaning can be created as you craft yourself into an authentic being, as you find ways to own and own up to your deeds in the world. This links back to the earlier discussions on the GROW and OSKAR models too when considering what our goals may be and how to go about fashioning them. One could argue that existentialism is, as such, 'a philosophy of hope through reflection and creativity' (Kalderimis, 2010, p83). Encouraging clients to reflect on their own values and, if they lack a clear sense of meaning, to explore the possibility that it can be found through being authentic and creative aligns with the aim of offering them scaffolded support to stimulate/challenge their career decision-making. This idea of existentialism as offering hope also stands in contrast to the pre-conceived negative ideas about it that clients may have which were mentioned earlier – translating this message effectively in the contracting phase would play a role in addressing those pre-conceptions.

When the Skilled Helper moves into the challenging stage 'the client is encouraged to consider new possibilities and perspectives' (Nelson, 2007, p4). Here, to help take the client out of their own viewpoint, integrating existential views on the nature of truth may prove useful as stimuli or discussion points. Perspectivism is an existential view that no one has access to objective truth. All judgements of truth or value are perspectival and, as such, there is no one way of seeing/interpreting the world which is definitively true.

One of the points that Nietzsche (2003) argues is that there is no such thing as one correct and absolute viewpoint. If perspectivism is correct, then we are forced to abandon any hope of claiming absolute knowledge which is directly relevant to a discussion on what the "right" career path is or how one ought to live their life. Open-mindedness is a key part of the existential attitude and is important if one is to challenge one's own viewpoint and thinking effectively. If we pose the question about objectivity to our clients with, as Jaspers suggests, the challenging view that the 'hope of complete objectivity is linked to the hope of utopia... Both are illusory' (Blackham, 1959, p46) then this could open up a rich discussion on our clients' understanding of what constitutes success, the right career

choice, and how they ought to act. Considerations around career success as a construct and its objectivity or subjectivity vary (Heslin, 2005), and affording clients a chance to consider their own understanding of success in relation to Jasper's claim aligns with this aim of challenging client's perspectives and outlook.

## Conclusions

Drawing from the examples above, there is space within career coaching models for philosophical questioning, and there is a clear case for coaches to consider integrating a range of existentialism-inspired questions and challenges into their practice. The integration of existentialism into other coaching and counselling spheres further supports the case that it aligns with, and can bring value to, the aims of career coaching specifically. The resulting impact of this upon the ability of the coach to engage with and help their client would appear to be one worthy of further research. Drawing from the existing practice in other contexts in order to create resources for career coaches to add existentialism into their toolkits is also an endeavour worthy of consideration, as is further empirical research based around the effect/results of this type of questioning in a career coaching setting.

Adopting the existential attitude in our questioning approach - engaging the client with a method of enquiry that addresses ultimate questions through an examination of their own feelings, experiences, and relationship to the world - is a way to help a client move forwards in their career-thinking and consider what is of ultimate value to themselves and how best to try to get there with honesty and self-awareness. Existential concepts, such as authenticity and essence, align well with elements of three distinct career coaching models and are valuable additions to a coach's toolkit to help stimulate, challenge and shift forwards a client's thinking when faced with difficult career-related questions.

As a result, this article argues that existentialism, and philosophy more broadly, has a strong potential to help transform a client's assessment of themselves and the world in which they live. The central existential themes that have been considered are all aimed explicitly at challenging our view of ourselves and the world. There is a rich library of existential literature, film and art which could be used to help educate coaches in these concepts and prepare them to introduce the existential attitude as a tool in their career coaching kit.

Our daily lives and routines are lived, often without questioning these deeper themes, but when we face up to why we live life in a particular way - which a meaningful discussion with a career coach will likely involve - and do this with a sense of wonder as existentialism asks us to, this could help to bring about a genuine sense of challenge to one's own thinking, developing our ability to 'know thyself'.



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