



Coaching at Work road-tests The Coaching Dilemma Cards[®]

RISK ASSESSOR

1 The tool What is it?

The Coaching Dilemma Cards[®] are a set of 20 cards, each representing a common coaching dilemma, developed by coaching supervisors Carol Whitaker and Michelle Lucas from their own experiences. The cards are used within coach training, CPD and supervision to stimulate discussions about how a 'tricky situation' could be handled.

Each pack is organised into four categories, which look at different ethical challenges: Confidentiality; Boundaries; Conflicts of Interest and Dual Relationships. Some examples are given below:

1. Confidentiality – handling information when working with multiple stakeholders

● *Horses for courses?*

You're working with a client to help them develop a more effective leadership style. You become aware that their espoused style conflicts with your own values and, from your understanding of the organisation, it would also conflict with the values of the organisation.

What could you do?

2. Boundaries – straying from professional coaching territory

● *Coach or consultant?*

Your client repeatedly asks for advice on what to do. They know you are well-informed about the organisation and believe you can give a perspective that will help the

coaching process and outcomes.
What could you do?

As different settings cause subtly different dilemmas, separate sets of cards have been developed to reflect this – for independent, internal and team coaches. Packs for mentors and line managers are in the pipeline.

How does it work?

At a practical level, each category is a different colour and each card is numbered so it's easy to keep track of all the cards. Similarly, each different application, or pack, of cards is identified by a different set of four colours.

Each dilemma card provides a vehicle for provoking conversation and debate, prompting participants to recall and share similar experiences of their own.

The aim is to generate a diversity and breadth of perspective that will:

- illustrate how many 'possible options' there are in response to the dilemma
- raise awareness of what is influencing an individual's choice
- help them consider what else they might explore in the future.

The process seeks to empower delegates' learning, by positioning the supervisors as facilitators rather than teachers. A variety of approaches are encouraged to elicit how the context

influenced the coach's choice, and to highlight that there is rarely an absolute right or wrong. This doesn't mean that 'anything goes' and, of course, participants offering an approach that feels risky are invited to explain why they choose to work this way. Any blind spots are highlighted, fulfilling the normative function of supervision constructively.

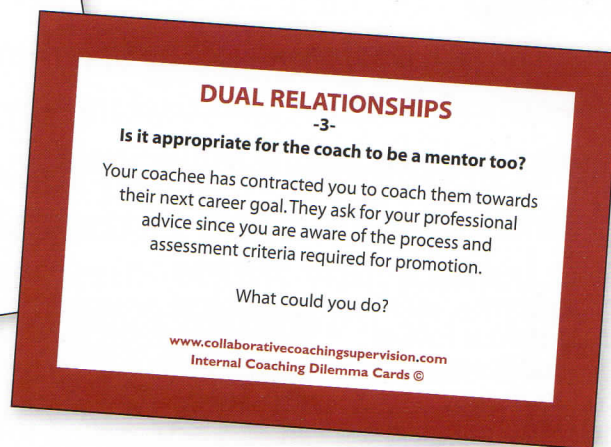
Coaching Dilemma Cards: pros and cons

UPSIDE

- Makes it easier to recall personal coaching experiences
- Illustrates that there is rarely a one-size-fits-all approach
- Easily generates debate and flushes out a diversity of approaches and opinions
- Tailored to fit coaches' context

DOWNSIDE

- Without proper training, the cards could be a vehicle to 'test' coaches
- Some of the language does not easily translate across sectors (although the developers are working on this)
- In raising awareness of blind spots, further individual support may be needed, which might fall outside the remit of the intervention contracted for



Who can use them?

Qualified supervisors or experienced coaches are best placed to use the cards, supporting CPD in a number of ways, with individuals and groups, and both face-to-face and via Webinar.

To become licensed to use the cards, you need to attend a one-day "train the trainer" workshop and complete a short assignment.

For more information, visit: www.collaborativecoachingsupervision.com

2 The coach/ administrator

The experience

We have found that the choice of dilemmas helps coaches elicit their own experiences. This is particularly beneficial when supervising novice coaches or those who have a low intensity to their work – in fact any coach that is hesitant about "what to bring" to supervision.

The cards prompt coaches to recall some of their own experiences, which they perhaps didn't feel were "worth bringing" or had imagined only they struggled with. The cards can also be used as a standalone event as CPD for experienced coaches.

Each dilemma provides a set of multiple choice options – offering

a range of potential approaches. Participants choose their preferred approach, and a discussion then ensues comparing and contrasting the reasons for their choice. The cards don't "teach" right and wrong ethical approaches, rather they raise awareness of how an approach will always "depend" on the context and the contractual set up.

While we provide five "pre-determined" choices, the sixth option is "something else". This encourages and honours even more diversity.

Participants tell us they "instinctively know" their preferred approach, but when listening to other coaches they realise they have many more options than they imagined. They start to recognise their assumptions and biases.

They also find ways of blending their natural approach with learning from their peers. This subtly reminds us not to be complacent about our coaching approaches. It offers an opportunity to both benchmark approaches and affirm good practice.

Finally, appreciating difference in this way helps create a genuine sense of community among participants.

Carol Whitaker and **Michelle Lucas** are co-creators of the Coaching Dilemma Cards © www.collaborativecoachingsupervision.com

3 The client

The experience

Members of our internal coaching network were given the opportunity to attend a Coaching Dilemmas workshop. Places were booked quickly. Michelle and Carol contracted with the group at the start of the session to ensure that dilemmas would be discussed in the spirit of exploring different approaches, rather than judging or dismissing them. We worked through a dilemma in plenary and then divided into groups, using the cards to discuss options and experiences.

Throughout the workshop there was a buzz of positive energy, as coaches enjoyed the freedom of discussing dilemmas that were relevant to, but not directly owned, by them. The workshop refreshed and energised coaches by providing a practical session that highlighted important themes, including contracting, confidentiality within internal networks and a reminder that in coaching there is always more than one solution.

As manager of the coaching service, it affirmed my sense of pride in the professionalism and effectiveness of our internal coaches.

Sam East is a career development co-ordinator at Oxfordshire County Council