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## **On the Effectiveness of the Solution-Focused Approach and Coaching in the Work of Social Services**

### **O skuteczności podejścia skoncentrowanego na rozwiązaniach i coachingu w pracy służb społecznych**

#### **Introduction**

This text aims at to encourage education towards broadening the methodological skills of social services and to use a solution-centred approach and/or coaching to support clients towards achieving the desired changes. In the first place, the stages of methodological proceedings are briefly presented, the definition of change and a specific action explained, as well as basic issues from psychology, in particular regarding the motivation to change, discussed. The concept seems even more relevant when we analyze both approaches from the perspective of the clients' intrinsic motivation, with particular attention paid to the path and pace of achieving the change.

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The main objective, however, is to present the core of the solution-based approach and coaching in terms of motivational psychology with particular focus on applying it also in social work when dealing with clients of low-motivation and do-ability profiles. In the current world, with changing roles of social workers as well as wider plethora of available tools, it seems the more essential to advocate the importance of applying individual, tailored approach to meet the demands and expectations of the clients. Due to delegating such duties as benefit management to clerks or introducing Social Services Centres, social workers are able to devote more time to tackle other duties. Thus, training and providing them with new tools seems of key importance. This article presents several examples of basic techniques used in coaching and SCA (solution-centred approach), that can be applied without the need to attend tedious trainings. What is more, workers can make a selection of the method or approach that appeals to them and matches their client's needs most, to develop and expand them further on. Finally, a short comparison and contrast of both approaches is presented, with the most interesting aspects highlighted.

A comparative analysis of the two approaches to working with the client in the model of social work as problem solving and the model of concentration on the goal was made. Several decades ago, such a distinction was made, among others, by Butrym Z. (1998), which still meets the current trends of modern social work and is widely discussed by scholars nowadays (i.e. E. Marynowicz-Hetka) or implied in practice by I. Krasiejko, J. Szczepkowski, L. Miś, M. Szpunar, or M. Grewiński, among others. Currently, combining a solution-focused approach and coaching has been more commonly applied in social work, therefore, it is worth looking at *modus operanti* of these models in social work as well as the similarities and fundamental differences between them. This will allow for a better understanding of the basics of working with the client in one or another methodology. It can also be an inspiration for the creative use of individual coaching tools or a solution-focused approach depending on customers, their predispositions, resources, or competences. In this way, the social worker can also choose tools that are closer to his personal preferences, abilities, or temperament.

Every methodical procedure in social work (and action in general) has its own goal, and this goal is to lead to a change in the state of affairs, or possibly, to development. Literature refers to a distinction between these two concepts, often describing the change as modification, transformation, movement or

shift of a specific structure or process. On the other hand, the development will concern a certain continuity of changes taking place at a time most convenient for the client. These changes can be dynamic, violent, unexpected, but also progressive (cf. de Robertis C., 1998, p. 90). The assumption is that every methodical action in working with an individual, as well as a group and the environment, leads to specific changes or serves development. On the other hand, the direction of changes and their dynamics pose many problems, which are reflected in the construction of evaluation. Also important is the issue of taking responsibility for the mere process of change, i.e. determining to what extent the client is responsible for the direction of change and its dynamics, and to what extent the social worker holds the responsibility. It is worth highlighting here that the process of change depends on many factors that are difficult to assess, or even diagnose or abstract (for example: readiness to change on the part of the client, methodical preparation of the social worker, adequacy of methods to the situation, well-being of both parties at the given moment, external strengthening or disturbing factors, legal requirements, family companions, etc.). The very concept of change leads to another dilemma, which is the attempt to answer what transformations are involved, who is to define change (its goal) and how to measure it, and finally how to evaluate it (cf. de Robertis C., 1998, p. 91). As the author notes, social workers who work in accordance with the medical model, make use of the in-depth diagnoses. This allows them to perceive behaviours and states that are outside the social norm. The subject of social work, in this view, will be the pursuit of established norms (cf. *ibid.*). In such a situation, you can fall into the trap of limiting the scope of view during the diagnosis, missing or unnoticing the client's resources, plans and dreams.

### **Stages of methodological procedure**

Referring to the cited literature, it is worth looking at the stages of methodological procedure, which in some ways are also present in SCA and coaching. The first of them is to get acquainted with a social problem or a request. This is the moment when the social worker meets with the client and the client verbalizes his expectations of the problem he or she is experiencing or the situation that he or she thinks it needs to be changed. These assumptions include both a voluntary situation, i.e. one where the client is the initiator of

the meeting and starting a methodological action, and an involuntary one, i.e. one where the initiator of the change can be the social services or court. The second stage of methodical proceedings, according to Robertis, is the analysis of the situation, which consists of collecting information about both the client and his environment to be followed by a description of the existing situation (diagnostic actions). The methods of working with the client presented in this article (coaching and SCA) are not based on a thorough diagnosis, on the search for the causes of the state of affairs or the genesis of the problem situation. Their focus is on diagnosing the client's resources and, above all, on the goal he wants to pursue. It is the client assisted by a social worker who describes his resources, either using appropriate techniques in SCA or coaching, he expands his awareness of their existence and the possibility of their use. The third stage of the methodological procedure is the initial and operational assessment. It is a synthesis of conclusions from the diagnosis, which will be the starting point for planning the action. In coaching such a stage is a study of reality, which during the conversation is formulated by the client himself and consented by the coach with the use of appropriate, supportive tools (e.g., big 5, or in SCA looking for exceptions, scaling). The fourth stage is the development of an action project, which for Robertis (*ibid.*) is a clarification of the objectives of the change. This is to define short- and long-term objectives as well as the area and the intensity of the action, and adopt an action strategy by developing the final action design. SCA and coaching is based on individual work, i.e. the choice of action strategy occurs only in relation to the client's activity. Of course, he or she can use the resources of his/her environment, but the initiator, planner and main actor of the action is solely the client. There is no mention here of planning a strategy for working with the family, unless individual's family members are involved in the change project and consequently participate in the described work using the SCA method or coaching. The next stage of the methodological procedure is to undertake a joint project. In the case of a coach, there is no question of working together outside of meetings, the only possible activities (supporting the design) are taken during the sessions. When it comes to combining a solution-focused approach with the work of a social worker, such indirect actions take place during the implementation of social work. However, solely actions in the SCA trend leave the responsibility for the change rest on the client. The sixth stage of the methodological procedure is the evaluation of the results. During each subsequent meeting in a solution-

focused approach or in coaching, at the beginning of the conversation there is an analysis of the assumed results (e.g. by scaling the change) and verification or clarification of the assumed goal. The final evaluation takes place at the end of the action, where the achievement of the assumed goals is analysed. The last stage of the methodological procedure is the completion of action (cf. Robertis, 1998, pp. 98-101). The most advantageous solution would be to crown the action with the implementation of the assumed goal, as well as the independence of the individual, understood as the usage cessation of the support of social services.

Both methods have a common denominator when it comes to the basic assumptions, namely, only the customer is responsible for the change, and the social worker plays the role of the one who helps in strengthening resources and strengthening motivation. In the case of social work as problem solving, it is the strengthening of internal and external resources, while in the case of concentration on the goal, it is the support in defining the goal, contracting it and consistently, in stages, reaching it during the session. None of these models assumes an in-depth diagnosis.

Butrym (after Perlman) writes about the personal relationship between a social worker and a client, which is a work tool, not an end in itself. This is a consequence of the belief that the client comes to the social worker as to a professional, thus assuming that the latter is competent and has the right skills to support him/her in solving the problem.

### **Motivation to change**

None of the changes in a person's life takes place without motivation. Sources of motivation can range from external factors (e.g. a court order, the threat of losing an important value in life) or internal factors (e.g. a desire to change because of the cherished values). Zimbardo (2010), points out that "motivation is the internal processes by which we pursue a goal or avoid a situation that is considered unpleasant. Motivation is stimulation to act. Motivation is the mental processes that stimulate, allow choice, and direct behaviour" (2010, p. 60). The desire to achieve a goal that is positive for the individual and results from their internal motivation, the belief in the desire to achieve a given state of affairs is a process that in the course of change requires the support of a therapist/coach and does not require convincing about its

legitimacy. Goals imposed by others (court, social worker, loved ones) will always arouse resistance, not only because of the legitimacy of the change or its value, but because of the belief that it is not an autonomous decision. In addition, it should be emphasized that intrinsic motivation may be weakened as a result of the controlling way of working with the client, or other forms of control that limit the freedom of action (Wróbel, Finogenow, 2012, p. 81). In other words, if social workers/family assistants understand their role as a controller or restrict the client in any way from setting or reaching a goal, even a motivated client will withdraw from the process of change. Studies have recently been conducted on the excessive use of control in the social workers and family assistants' work, which confirm with all firmness that these controlling, directive actions are preferred in the social assistance environment. The motives for this state of affairs are diverse, but they boil down to one effect – the client's resistance to change (see Krasiejko 2013; Rutkowska, Szpunar, 2018).

The internalization of values is the best stimulator of action and, as Zaborowski writes, it should be combined with the concept of one's own reason. "Own reason is recognized as one of the main motivators of action" (Pawlaczyk, 2017, p. 87). Zaborowski (ibid.) claims that the shape of our professional, social, family life, relationship with another person is determined by conviction, conscious or unconscious, what we consider to be our own right and values (from: Zaborowski, 1980, pp. 189–195). In addition, the emotional attitude to the goal is also important if it is consistent with one's own reason. Usually, this attitude is positive and positive motivation is more liberating and keeps a person in a state of activity. On the other hand, a goal that is not entirely consistent with our values causes a feeling of discomfort, and every person will avoid such an emotional state (Rogers, 2010, pp. 189-195). A goal that is not accepted by the client reduces their commitment to change. As Reda (2017) points out, "emotions consistent with the goal (the so-called positive) facilitate the achievement of the set goal, and emotions inconsistent with the goal (the so-called negative) interfere with this" (2017, p. 131). Understanding this justification by social workers and family assistants is crucial in constructing assistance plans or writing contracts with clients. Social workers and assistants are accused of imposing directive targets on families, which often result from pressure from management, local authorities, and even the public. Several studies by Polish researchers indicate a strong disconnect between the expectations of management, local authorities, customers and public opinion,

as regards social work and professionalization on the part of social workers. In 1994, A. Kotlarska-Michalska conducted a study which shows that clients are interested only in financial, specific support, and not in innovations in the methodology of social work. Public opinion, on the other hand, describes social work and social assistance activities in terms of helplessness and lack of professionalism. Local governments expect measurable financial effects, i.e., those that will not overburden current budgets (1999, p. 179). Subsequent research by D. Trawkowska indicates, among other things, that the management of social welfare centres mainly expects their employees to make a proper diagnosis when qualifying for assistance, improve their qualifications and, to a small extent, implement and develop programmes aimed at improving the quality of life and initiate new forms of providing assistance (2006, pp. 204–205). In her research in 2006, Trawkowska draws attention to the fact that the relationship between social workers and the authorities is condemned to a constant experience of moral dilemmas through the necessity of conformist submission to authority, which, as Frysztański put it, is historically the most obvious and fixed dilemma (cf. Trawkowska, 2006, pp. 326–327). Numerous studies confirm the birth of moral dilemmas in direct practice, i.e. conducting social work against the will of the client (m.in. Kromolicka, 2002; Olech, 1999; Brągiel, 1998; Trawkowska, 2006). Sometimes it is an indirect action, taken against the will of the client, granting benefits or services against his expectations. Social workers are looking for a moral, legal justification for such an action, and in the context of the topic addressed in this text, it is also worth considering the effectiveness and consequences in the relationship between the client and the social worker.

The client's goals actually become the goals of the aid institution, which usually results in the lack of the desired effects. This does not mean that customers have inconsistent goals with social welfare institutions. They also usually realize during the process of expanding their consciousness and defining the goal that it is worth reaching out to other changes. However, this must be done in a sense of understanding the client's opinion and in a relationship of mutual respect.

It can be said that SCA and coaching differ fundamentally in the perspective of the clients' perception and their life situation, and focus on five issues – the first being the focus on goals and customer-defined needs, not on their problems. Secondly, the change is possible by turning to potential and basing

on strengths, not on shortcomings and weaknesses, on previous successes (albeit small ones) instead of failures. It is worth focusing on exceptions to the problem situation (when the problem was not there, it occurred in a lesser intensity, or the client coped with it) instead of on the frequency of its appearance and its size. The last change concerns the definition of life situation towards focusing on the vision of the preferred future, and not the overwhelming past (hence, among other things, the lack of an in-depth diagnosis in this respect) (cf. Krasiejko, 2012, p. 83).

This study briefly introduces the concept of the motivation for change, as its main aim is to compare the two approaches and draw conclusions for the practice of social work, as to show the usefulness of combining the solution-focused approach and coaching in working with social assistance clients.

### **The main assumptions of SCA and coaching from the perspective of the client's goal**

When analyzing the sources of the solution-focused approach, attention should be paid to, among other things, as Szczepkowski describes it (2010, pp. 56–58), the nature of social reality, i.e., the fact that this reality is relative, individualized and burdened each time with the personal experience of the individual, which means that it gives a different meaning to what happens to him/her. In addition, it is important who is therefore entitled to formulate the “right interpretation” (e.g. the life and conduct of the client). Hence, in SCA it is the “expert client” in his life, who often contradicts the omnipotence attitude of social workers/family assistants, or the main assumptions of social policy.

A solution-focused approach has three main ideas: if something is not broken – do not fix it, if something works – do more of it, and if something does not work – do not do it again, do something else. The first of them refers to pragmatics and economics of action, which assumes that the intervention of the helper is to be limited to the necessary minimum and is not aimed at introducing a revolution in the client's life. If something works, satisfies the customer, let it stay that way. The second principle refers to the assumption that the client has resources, though small, potentially is successful in functioning; so, he/she should multiply them. Their success is the best motivator for further changes, improvements, and reduces the feeling of fear of failure, even if you try new, untouched ways of coping. The third principle derives from the

assumption that certain dysfunctions arise as a result of erroneous solutions. There is no point in repeating these solutions when they have not produced the desired results before, and ineffective actions only maintain the existence of problems. In addition, it is emphasized that serious problems usually have many simple solutions, and the client can discover them and apply them in his life (cf. Szczepkowski, 2010, pp. 59–61). SCA also focuses on solution and not on the problem, but this solution does not have to be related to the problem or its cause at all.

In coaching, as in SCA, the basis of the convention is the goal that is defined by the client. It is commonly accepted that coaching mainly deals with the client's development goals and those ones that are important in the development of a professional career. It is worth realizing that more and more often the coach works in the area of the so-called live coaching, i.e. on development and/or improving the clients' quality of life in all areas of their functioning. Social welfare clients set themselves similar life goals, although maybe in many cases these have a different dimension. They are committed to professional development, professional activation, improvement of interpersonal relationships, taking care of oneself and one's environment. Certainly, we are more often faced in coaching with a client who is voluntary and more aware of his life goals. Bennewicz et. al. underline the significance of three principles governing the change in coaching, namely: responsibility, usefulness and ecology of change. The first shall be understood as the agreement to make decisions in your own way, both with regards to the client and coach. It is the client who should be responsible for setting his goals and accomplishment of particular stages of the change, leading them to the ultimate goal. The coach, on the other hand, holds the responsibility for the proper planning stage, yet refrain from interfering into the goal itself, as well as the way or pace of reaching it. They need to make the client aware and offer guidelines which will in turn make them reach for the doable and achievable goals, within the range of their own responsibilities, independent of third parties. The next principle regards usefulness and practical aspect that the goal should bring to the client, not the coach or Director of the Social Welfare Institution. The final one, ecology of action and changes in coaching concerns the impact every deed has on the environment. The main task is to make sure no action will inflict pain, do harm or damage those around. This principle of determining goals aimed at diminishing damages (i.e. limiting or giving

up alcohol consume) or refraining from violent actions (i.e. family abuse) is essential in social work (Bennewicz, Prelewicz, 2018, pp. 18–22). However, we are dealing with the same assumption in both models: the client is an expert in his life, which brings him closer over time to the voluntary work on change.

Adopting an attitude of “ignorance” is present in both approaches. This makes it much easier not to impose own solutions, and to open up to the client’s solutions, which in the process of change are the most effective and tested by the client prior (in SCA, e.g. a question about exceptions, while in coaching, e.g. questions about options). It is also a consequence of the assumption that the client has their own resources and is able to use them. Sometimes it is a difficult challenge for a social worker/family assistant when they are aware of their client’s low competence and decide that advice in some area is necessary. On the other hand, consulting can be one of the options for the client in the direction of looking for a way to change.

According to Orlinsky (2007), coaching is a constructive-conducting form of psychosocial practice that is designed to optimize unrealized potential through talent development and improvement of effective skills from an unsatisfactory, average level of performance to improved or excellent performance (Orlinsky, 2007, after: Rock, Page, 2014, p. 37).

Noteworthy in the context of the proposed analysis in this text it is the distinction by J. Rogers (2017) of the principles of coaching: 1. the client is a source of resources, 2. asking the right questions, posing challenges and providing support, the coach makes the client start using his/her own resources, 3. coaching concerns the whole person – with his/her past, present and future, 4. the client chooses the topic, 5. the coach and the client are equal, 6. the goal of coaching is change and action (Rogers, 2017, pp. 15–17).

As Rattner, George and Iveson (2012) put it, a solution-focused approach in its assumptions does not make an initial assessment (as previously mentioned, the diagnostic element is limited here), and therefore the client can immediately work on the change. Change is a continuous and constant process in the life of each of us, so the work in this trend focuses on emphasizing the fact that it is happening, not initiating changes. It is important in SCA to realize that the client brings patterns of problems as well as, what is equally important, patterns of solutions, and in accordance with the basic principles of SCA, to do more what he/she has already done in the direction of solving the problem and what was effective. In order to fight effectively with the customer’s resistance,

it is worth bearing in mind that the client is currently doing what is currently viable for him/her (otherwise the client is given the right to define and get the readiness to change). Each session should be treated as if it were to be the last and bring a constant structure and openness to defining the change independently by the client. According to the systemic pedigree of SCA – a change of one element in the client's life causes further changes, one change initiates another as a domino effect. The clients, as responsible for changes in their life, must have enough time to make these changes in the course of action, and not in a session with a social worker (cf. Rattner, George, Iveson, 2012, pp. 47–48).

The basic assumption in the solution-focused approach as well as in coaching is that the client is an expert, forecaster and guide in the process of change. In this approach, one works on solutions that already exist, even in the germ, in the client himself/herself or in his/her environment. A professional, on the other hand, has the task of making it easier for the customer to see which solutions have already worked in any respect, not to provide new ones (after: Kienhuis, Fletcher, Rademakers, Ruyter, 2007, p. 15). It is similar in the assumptions of coaching. It is the client, looking for the ways to make a change in his/her past, who chooses such solutions that he/she has already successfully tried. In coaching, the coach is allowed to lead in the direction of searching for solutions that, according to the client, can lead the latter one to the goal, but it is to him/her that the solutions must seem beneficial/useful in his/her individual work on himself/herself. Even if the client claims that he/she does not know the answer to the question asked (“I do not know”), in both approaches either silence is used or the question is repeated (unchanged or similar) to mobilize the client to look for solutions in himself/herself, because they are the best according to the assumptions.

The solution-focused approach is successfully used in clients with a variety of problems: in child upbringing, addictions, unemployment. Ratner, George and Iveson (ibid.) underline that the solution-focused approach differs, among other things, in being dedicated to a client with specific problems. While, the authors maintain that the coached client usually comes with a specific goal to achieve, rather than an issue to solve (Ratner, George and Iveson, 2017, p. 214). Analyzing the assumptions of coaching and the methodology of work in this trend, it can be said that there is a probability that the client will come to such a meeting with a specific goal, but each time the coach's task is to examine

in the first stage of the conversation whether this goal has been properly defined (whether it is real, measurable, dependent on the client, ecological, timely, positive). Each time the coach starts working with the client from the proper definition or clarification of the previously defined goal. The client can also come with a goal that is only seemingly his/her and in the process of defining it, expanding awareness, or searching why it is difficult for the client to maintain motivation, it turns out that this goal is a goal forced by social expectations (e.g. the desire to be slim, because there is such a media trend, socially desirable). When it comes to TSR, however, we can agree that clients may (do not have to) have a different level of motivation, but the very meeting with the therapist should indicate that they want the change to come about. TSR also talks about “involuntary clients” in the therapy process. Nevertheless, the question is whether it does not conflict with the whole philosophy of TSR. In the case of involuntary clients, one firstly works on expanding awareness, and then on defining the goal. However, if the expansion of awareness does not result in the goal becoming the goal of the client (and not the social welfare institution), then it seems that it is difficult to maintain motivation to change and this does not fit into the assumptions of TSR where the client is an expert in his/her life.

The second difference these authors mention is the question of power. For them, the therapist in a solution-focused approach is less likely to abuse power, and the coach is guided by an ethos compared by them to an accountant or a lawyer. It seems that the authors assume that a coach cannot work with the client on other areas of life than those related to aspirations, professional or personal development. At this point, it is worth emphasizing that social work is not only work on the client's problems (with addiction, with getting out of depression), but also work on becoming independent, personal and professional development (maybe on a different scale or at a different stage of development) or activating life in every selected area. Orientation in social work in Poland is changing in the direction of separating the problem from the client, working on his resources and his goals, which are defined individually by the clients, and promoting the non-directive approach of the social worker to the assistance plan. Such an innovative approach turns out to be more effective than the traditional identification of the social assistance client with the goals of the institution to which he/she turns for help. It should be added, however, that these practices have not been common so far, as shown by Polish

research on the directiveness of actions (Szpunar, 2020; Szpunar, Rutkowska, 2018), subjectivity of family assistants (Ciczowska-Giedziun, 2020), or the sense of security of social workers (Boryczko, 2016).

The third difference concerns the responsibility of the coach and therapist in a solution-centred approach. The authors here present the example of a depressed client who, some claim, should be taken care of by a TSR coach or therapist. This approach is hard to acknowledge, they say, and underline that it is more the job of a psychiatrist (2017, p. 215). It seems that the success of coaching and TSR lies precisely in the fact that the responsibility for achieving the goal is on the client's side. The responsibility of the TSR coach and therapist concerns another important area of professional activities, namely the ability to respect his/her freedom and subjectivity in choosing the path of change (or sometimes lack of readiness for such a change).

### **Structure of the change process in SCA and coaching**

The structure of work in the PS model, as Krasiejko (2010), describes it, is basically based on the following stages: feeling the problem, defining the problem, that is, determining what the difficulty is, then searching for solutions, choosing these solutions, implementing and evaluating the implementation of the solution (2010, p. 176). The last two stages are stages that happen outside the meeting.

Świtek (2009), divides the process into four stages: the 1st stage of the search, i.e. the search for answers to the basic questions (what is happening? and what and/or why needs to be changed?), the 2nd stage of determination, focused on finding/determining how to change, what needs to be adjusted (how to make the change come about), heading towards the 3rd stage of action, or more precisely – the transition to action, and, finally, making the change happen is the 4th and ultimate stage (2009, p. 92).

Looking for points of contact with coaching, it can be generally stated that it has more fixed elements in its structure than SCA and more accurately is leading the client to achieve the goal. Coaching talks about the so-called GROW structure (G – goal, R – reality, O – options, W – way forward) and OSKAR approach (O – outcome, S – situation, K – choices and consequences, A – action, R – review), which take place at every meeting and which each time refer to the main goal. In addition, at the beginning of the session (as in

SCA), the coach asks about the progress in achieving the goal and gives the opportunity to redefine it, depending on the client's priorities. In coaching, the most important stage of work is to set and clarify the goal with the client. Therefore, it is this stage (G) that receives the most attention and, if it is well-defined, further stages come to the client with greater ease, being the natural consequences of the first stage (Rogers, 2017, pp. 125–126). For a coach, the goal must be characterized by six features – it should be ecological, positively described, customer-dependent, measurable, timely and real. Goal ecology is the customer's sense that by achieving the goal he can lose something and gain something. He should be aware of whether he/she is ready for such losses. SCA also emphasizes making the client aware of the costs he/she will incur by changing his/her life (e.g. in both approaches the method of weighting and deciding is used, where the client is to analyze the profits and losses of both change and staying in the current situation). A positive description of a goal involves defining it as something that the customers want, not what they don't want. From a psychological point of view, what is motivating and imaginable is something that is present, not lacking (e.g. an image of life in abstinence, activity, not a state: I do not drink, I do not ride a bike). The purpose dependent on the client indicates that the action taken to change is the responsibility of the client and his/her ability to influence the situation in which he/she currently finds himself/herself. The same approach is represented by the representatives of SCA trend. The measurability of a goal is to clarify it in terms of size, frequency, or defining other indicators by which the client knows that a given goal has already been achieved. In the same way, the goal is clarified in a solution-focused approach, and some techniques have inscribed in their scenario the definition of goal achievement indicators (e.g. in the Miracle Question). Another feature of a well-formulated goal is punctuality, i.e. setting a specific date when a given goal the client wants to achieve. Determining the date gives a sense of certain boundaries, the pace that he/she will set for himself/herself and is to correspond to his/her capabilities, both organizational and related to the level of determination. It appeals to his/her readiness and provides the impression of agency. The last feature of the goal is its reality, or in other words achievability by the client. In a solution-focused approach, all of these features are attended to, which is reflected in many methods. A well-defined goal defines the path to change. It is worth noticing that social workers or family assistants, using solution-focused approach methods, attach importance, just like a coach, to the same precise definition of the goal.

In the literature focusing on a solution-based approach (Berg, Miller, Krasiejko, Świtek *ibid.*), the authors describe the features of a well-formulated goal and these, at first glance, seem similar to those described in coaching. A well-formulated goal is the one that is related to the client, thus motivated to achieve it. It is defined as possible (i.e. noticeable and measurable), while in coaching – as measurable. It is emphasized that in SCA the goals are to be small for the client because they guarantee a better chance of success, which in turn builds a sense of agency and motivation to change. On the other hand, they are to be ambitious, so that the client has the feeling that whatever he changes in his life is important. Another feature refers to the fact that the goal is visible, indicating the presence, but not the lack.

### **All these elements can also be found in SCA methods, e.g. in imaging or Wonder Question**

Coaching can be defined by describing the coach's tasks towards the client. D. Rock and L.J. Page state that a coach is a 'change agent' who acts in the interests of his clients (2014, p. 35). In contrast, the International Coaching Federation (2008) defines the role of a coach as the one who has to listen to the client, observe and adapt their methods to their individual needs. He should strive to obtain solutions and strategies from the client, believing that each client is creative and inventive. The task of the coach is to provide support for the development of skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has.

Theorists and practitioners of the solution-centred approach emphasize the importance of using customer language (Rogers, 2017, p. 132–133). In both SCA and coaching, the change process takes the form of a language game, in which the client's language (their vocabulary) is primarily used. The conversation takes place in the language of their solutions, not the problems. Techniques such as detailing, reframing, phrasing, decrystallization are used (cf. Krasiejko, 2012, p. 76). The aim of the change is the general wellbeing of the client and acting to the benefit of his/her positive interests.

When it comes to the tools used in working with the client in both approaches, we can notice many similarities, or even the same tools used at different times of work with the client. The whole workshop will not be discussed here, because it is neither technically possible, nor the purpose of this article. However, it is worth pointing out some similarities. Scale is commonly used in both the solution-focused approach and coaching. The

way and structure of scaling is understood in the same way and takes place at different stages of the process of change and conversation with the client. It can be a reference to the power of motivation to change, to the progress in activities from meeting to meeting, as well as to illustrate the goal.

In both approaches, it refers to the imaging of the preferred future (SCA) or the achieved goal (this is how it tends to be defined in coaching). The mechanism can be said to be the same, namely the clients are to visualize themselves in a new situation, to which they declare the eagerness to go. In SCA, the therapist/assistant refers in the image to various areas of the clients' lives that may change, i.e. clients' feelings, senses, relationships, thoughts, behaviour, physicality and their environment (cf. Krasiejko, 2012, pp. 222–223). Imaging the preferred future is also a tool element in SCA, which is the Question of a Miracle. This question begins precisely by imagining a situation where there has been a change in life, or when the problem has ceased to exist, and then the conversation leader provokes the client to visualize this change by referring to emotions, thoughts, appearance or relationships which will change with the cessation of the problem or the implementation of the assumed goal (cf. Krasiejko, 2012, pp. 218–222). In the case of coaching, similar techniques are used when defining a goal that will meet the previously described features.

## Summary

Referring to the theoretical perspectives from which SCA and coaching draw, it is worth emphasizing that the legitimacy of using these combined approaches is justified due to subjectivism and different perception of the world. As Tomasz Biernat (2004) points out, each of us lives in a common world, but the perception of this world, experiencing it, is different. Each of us has our own perception of time and space, feeling the satisfaction of needs and emotions. Such an approach justifies the necessity and sense of getting to know the client's perspective, understanding the differentness of perceiving this perspective, moving in his world, instead of imposing his/her own perspective on the client (cf. Biernat, 2004, p. 140). In order to put the combined coaching and SCA principles into action, certain changes at local and national levels are required. Firstly, it is essential the training of social workers and family assistants to enhance development of their professional expertise. As Krasiejko reports, these are welcome in the professional community

mentioned above. Surely, the fact that Regional Welfare Centres tend to widen their offer of such trainings, using the EU funds, is a significant factor contributing to their popularity. There are several publications promoting and indicating areas of possible incorporation of SCA into social work (by i.e. Krasiejko, Szczepkowski or Świtek). Additionally, Gdańsk University, Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa or Warmińsko-Mazurski University offer courses which implement coaching and SCA into practical classes. Taking the bureaucratic load off the shoulders of a social worker has already become a fact in many cities, in turn allowing them to focus on their tasks and devote more time to enlarging their portfolio of services, or simply educate. Finally, putting principles of coaching or SCA into action has already been appreciated by many social workers and family assistants. This change is brought about by the field workers who together with selected scholars and non-governmental organisations (i.e. National Association of Family Assistants) or local politicians cooperating with Regional Welfare Offices (i.e. in Gdańsk, Poznań or Częstochowa) advocate the need and urge for it.

**Abstract:** The article is a comparative analysis of two methods of working with a social assistance client: coaching and solution-focused approach. It describes the stages of the methodological procedure, and shows the approach to the motivation to change in both approaches. Showing the differences between internal and external motivation in the case of social assistance clients is particularly important, as they are often people characterized by learning helplessness and with low social competence. Therefore, working on change is extremely difficult, and social and legal expectations generate many paradoxes of professional action. The solution, however, is not to control and monitor the customers' progress, but to change the approach of defining goals for change for customers. In coaching and PSR, key goals are the client's goals and this article explains the rationale behind this position. Then, it describes the assumptions of both approaches and presents similar techniques used in working with the client. These techniques are easy to adapt to the methodical work of social workers and assistants when they share the assumption that the client is the expert of their life, and thus of change and the path to change. It describes the structure of the change process in both approaches. The article is intended to encourage such an approach to working with clients, as it is effective, as well as releasing social workers from responsibility for clients' failures, protecting against burnout, and easy to apply. In addition, many

institutions of social assistance are leaning towards working with these methods, towards formulating goals in line with harm reduction, rather than radical changes.

**Keywords:** coaching, solution-focused approach, methodological procedure, motivation to change, professional development

**Streszczenie:** Artykuł zawiera analizę porównawczą dwóch metod pracy z klientem pomocy społecznej: coachingu oraz podejścia skoncentrowanego na rozwiązaniach. Opisano w nim etapy postępowania metodycznego oraz stosunek do motywacji do zmiany w obu podejściach. Pokazanie różnic między motywacją wewnętrzną i zewnętrzną w przypadku klientów pomocy społecznej jest szczególnie ważne, bo często są to osoby o wyuczonej bezradności oraz niskich kompetencjach społecznych. Praca nad zmianą jest więc wyjątkowo trudna, a oczekiwania społeczne i prawne generują wiele paradoksów działania profesjonalnego. Rozwiązaniem jednak nie jest kontrola i monitorowanie postępów klienta, ale zmiana podejścia wobec definiowania celów zmiany u klientów. W coachingu oraz PSR kluczowe cele to cele klienta i w artykule przedstawiono najpierw uzasadnienie takiego stanowiska. Następnie opisano założenia obu podejść i zaprezentowano podobne techniki wykorzystywane w pracy z klientem. Techniki te są proste do adaptacji w pracy metodycznej pracowników socjalnych i asystentów, gdy zakładają oni, że to klient jest ekspertem swojego życia, a tym samym zmiany i drogi do zmiany. W artykule scharakteryzowano strukturę procesu zmiany w obu podejściach. Celem podjętych rozważań jest zachęcenie do zaprezentowanego podejścia w pracy z klientami. Jest ono nie tylko skuteczne, lecz także zwalnia z odpowiedzialności pracowników socjalnych za porażki klientów, chroni przed wypaleniem zawodowym, a ponadto jest proste w zastosowaniu. Poza tym wiele instytucji pomocy społecznej skłania się ku pracy przedstawionymi metodami, tj. ku formułowaniu celów zgodnie z redukcją szkód, a nie radykalnymi zmianami.

**Słowa kluczowe:** coaching, podejście skoncentrowane na rozwiązaniach, postępowanie metodyczne, motywacja do zmiany, rozwój zawodowy

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Date of the submission of article to the Editor: 01.09.2021

Date of acceptance of the article: 15.11.2021