

## **Chapter 2**

### **Terms of Reference and Literature Review**

***Part I: Underlying Theory and Philosophy:  
Early Stages of the Coaching Model***

***Part II: Underlying Theory and Philosophy:  
Later Stages of the Coaching Model***

***Part III: Question Frameworks***

## Chapter 2

### Terms of Reference and Literature Review

#### ***Part I: Underlying Theory and Philosophy: Early Stages of the Coaching Model***

##### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the underlying philosophies and contemporary literature that have influenced the shape of the research project and my coaching model to date. I believe that the ‘interaction’ between coach and client is where the real work is done in executive coaching. Thus my research into the coaching intervention is specifically to investigate and analyse this process.

To date, most of the research in the ‘relationship’ or ‘encounter’ between client and practitioner has been undertaken in the field of psychotherapy. It is for this reason that I explored the contemporary literature in that and related fields as a starting point for my doctoral project. Existential phenomenology is used widely in psychotherapy models, but its origin is in philosophy. It has been employed in a number of areas, and explicitly in coaching. The two foremost exponents of existential phenomenology are Ernesto Spinelli and Freddie Strasser, both of whom have applied their research and scholarship in this field to coaching.

Part I explores the earliest influences on my coaching model such as linguistics, cognitive and behavioural psychology, systems thinking, paradigmatic plurality and cultural competence. Part II examines the underlying philosophies of existentialism, experiential learning, existential phenomenology, and existential psychotherapy. Part III analyses the contemporary coaching literature for models, question frameworks and examples of the coaching intervention.

##### **2.2 *Part I: Underlying Theory and Philosophy: Early Stages of the Coaching Model***

My original coaching model (which was never made explicit to clients until I began the doctoral programme) was influenced by my professional background in management science, leadership theory, motivational theory, accelerated learning theory, cognitive behavioural theory (as expressed in neuro-linguistic programming), brain-based learning, Jungian

analytical theory and systems thinking. The original model was presented in my research proposal, and is in Appendix 4.

### **2.2.1 Underlying theory and philosophy, early stages of the coaching model**

The evolving stages of the researcher's coaching model as a result of this project are explained in Chapter 5: Project Findings and shown in Appendix 4. The model has evolved over the last three years to clearly reflect a holistic system of circularity and quaternarity. Overall, the researcher's model is underpinned by a range of specific theoretical underpinnings including linguistics, paradigmatic thinking, cognitive behavioural and analytic psychology, phenomenology, existential phenomenology, existential psychotherapy, cultural competency, paradigm plurality, and systems of cultural and behavioural change.

## **2.3 Linguistics**

Linguistics is the study of human speech including the units, nature, structure and modifications of language. My coaching work is based largely on how people use and create meaning from language, consciously, unconsciously, in thought, feeling and behaviour. In linguistics, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that distinctions of meaning between related items in a language are often arbitrary and often particular to that language. Sapir and Whorf took this one step further by arguing that a person's worldview is largely determined by the vocabulary and syntax available in an individual's language.

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) was the first European to combine linguistics with a philosophical background; he compared language and thought in a hypothesis known as '*Weltanschauung*' or worldview. Although it has been largely discredited today, Humboldt argued that language actually determined thought. Humboldt viewed thought as being impossible without language, and language as completely determining thought. Today the theory of 'weak' determinism accepts that thought is merely affected by or influenced by our language.<sup>5</sup>

### **2.3.1 Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf**

"Human beings do not live in the objective world alone or alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication and reflection. The fact of

the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group” (Sapir, 1929).

This is a well-known quote from the American linguist and anthropologist Edward Sapir (1884-1936) in his article, “The Status of Linguistics as a Science” (1929). According to Sapir, the language we use, whichever it happens to be, divides our whole reality, which is a “kaleidoscopic flux of impressions”, into completely arbitrary compartments. The world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organised by our minds - and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We dissect reality into concepts and significances that are codified into the patterns of whichever language we speak.

### 2.3.2 Freud

Freud in *The Ego and the Id* (1927) asks the question: “How does a thing become conscious?” This could be asked more explicitly: “How does a thing become pre-conscious?” The answer could be: “By coming into connection with the linguistic images that relate to it”. Freud’s *The Ego and the Id* (1927) question helps us make a useful distinction when talking about the influence of language on thought: whether we are talking about conscious or unconscious thought. Conscious thought may be considered to be unconscious thought that has been given access to consciousness through the use of language. Words bring concepts from the unconscious mind into the conscious.<sup>6</sup>

This brings us back to the question of whether language determines thought. In relation to Freud’s theory, language does determine conscious thought, because conscious thought is (by Freud’s definition) thought that has been made conscious through language. But since the majority of thought is unquestionably unconscious, we cannot say that language determines thought wholly (Chandler, 1994).

The neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) analysis of language is that most people think by talking to themselves.<sup>7</sup> Most people are limited by their vocabulary and the structure of their language and their linguistic habits. This presents itself in coaching through making limiting assumptions explicit.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.3.3 Language

Having studied linguistics, and with my work in leadership training, facilitating learning, performance development and executive coaching, I have always been interested in the language people use, particularly within the realm of the coaching conversation. This is my primary reason for pursuing research into the “coach’s intervention” in the coaching

conversation. Linguistics looks for universal rules in discourse. In my research I have consistently looked for a linguistic analysis of coaching interventions in the client's narrative.<sup>9</sup>

#### 2.3.4 Noam Chomsky

In his lecture on *Language and the Mind*, Chomsky (1968) states that there “is an obvious sense in which any aspect of psychology is based ultimately on the observation of behaviour. But it is not at all obvious that the study of learning should proceed directly to the investigation of factors that control behaviour ... Human language can be used to inform or mislead, to clarify one's own thoughts or to display one's cleverness, or simply for play. If I speak with no concern for modifying your behaviour or thoughts, I am not using language any less than if I say exactly the same things with such intention. If we hope to understand human language and the psychological capacities on which it rests, we must first ask what it is, not how or for what purpose it is used”.

#### 2.3.5 Signs and meaning

Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* (1970) drew attention to and analysed the “meanings” of the things that surround us in our everyday lives. Barthes wanted us to stop taking things for granted, and to concentrate rather on what they mean and how they function as signs.

In the coaching context we do just this, helping the client to take a closer look at what gets taken for granted, making explicit what remains implicit, and making the seemingly irrational rational. Barthes' *Mythologies* is concerned with the meanings of the signs in our everyday lives, and a myth can be those myths that affect us in our contemporary society and help us to construct understanding or meaning in our world.

*Mythologies* consists of fifty-four texts written between 1954 and 1956, a path-breaking work still relevant today as these texts focus on various expressions of mass culture (i.e. films, advertising, the media, photography, and popular consumer items). Barthes' articles demonstrate the possibility of ‘reading’ the ‘paraphernalia’ of everyday life as full of meaning.

Reconstruction of meaning is one of the most important levels in which I work with my coaching clients. My original thinking when I began my doctoral research was to investigate the narrative and story-telling aspects within the client's conversation for significance and interpretation. I soon realised, however, that my work concentrates on researching the ‘coach's interventions’ in the client's narrative in order to help the client create change at the level of thinking, feeling, language, and behaviour – and how that ultimately impacts on performance. For me, this has opened up the coaching conversation to the influence of existential thought and experiential learning which I examine in Part II of this chapter. Experiential learning and

the existential point of view have both influenced the final design and structure of my coaching model.

## **2.4 Paradigms**

Thomas Kuhn (1977) originally defined paradigm as a “way of thinking and doing” and the inevitability of an irrational world beside the rational one. He showed, with his theory of paradigm shifts, that the world was partly discontinuous, or that there was more than one ‘rationalism’. It consists of the rational world and the logic of scientific discovery (Karl Popper, 1959), and the denial thereof. ‘Irrational’ is everything outside rational view, and there are limitless worlds which parallel the rational one.<sup>10</sup>

My contemporary coaching model reflects my individual coaching conversations with clients, which generally move to uncover limiting paradigms, or limiting assumptions, that hold them back or stop them from achieving their desired goals. My studies in the last three years (the duration of my doctoral research) have been influenced (in terms of identifying limiting worldviews) by the work of Nancy Kline (1999) and Jinny Ditzler’s Best Year Yet process (*Your Best Year Yet*, 2001). Best Year Yet is an individual and team coaching process that focuses on developing an awareness of disempowering paradigms, and creating empowering assumptions to move into the next 12-month period. As yet, as far as I am aware, there is no academic research into the theoretical underpinnings of the Best Year Yet process.

A specific influence has been practitioner training with Nancy Kline, who has developed a client/coach thinking process to uncover bedrock assumptions and to create positive liberating alternatives within a coaching process or a thinking partnership. The underpinnings of this work are those of Emmanuel Kant, Socrates, and Carl Rogers.

### **2.4.1 Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) and paradigms**

Thomas Kuhn wrote about the history of science and developed several important notions in the philosophy of science. He is most well known for *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970), in which he presented the idea that science does not evolve gradually toward truth, but instead undergoes periodic revolutions which he calls “paradigm shifts”. The term was first used by Thomas Kuhn in his book published in 1962.

The term, ‘paradigm shift’, is the term given for the process and result of a change in paradigm, usually total revolution in theory or worldview. The term originally referred to science, but has become more widely applied to other realms of human experience. After a given discipline has changed from one paradigm to another, this is called, in Kuhn’s

terminology, a scientific revolution or a paradigm shift. The term is used colloquially to mean “the (often radical) change of worldview” without reference to the specificities of Kuhn’s historical argument (Kuhn, 1970).

Another use of the term ‘paradigm shift’ is the notion of a major change in certain thought-patterns – a radical change in personal beliefs, complex systems or organisations, which replaces the former way of thinking or organising with a radically different way of thinking or organising.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas Kuhn introduced the idea that it is the attainment of a common “paradigm”, by the community of scientists working in a given problem area, that distinguishes science from other forms of study. He used the term in a very specific way to denote four defining characteristics of a uniquely scientific conceptual framework. These are: (1) a set of shared symbolic generalisations; (2) a common model of reality; (3) shared values as to standards and legitimate procedures; and (4) shared examples or models in the form of concrete problem solutions typical of the approach of the relevant scientific community.<sup>12</sup>

## **2.5 Cognitive behavioural and analytical schools of psychology**

### **2.5.1 Gestalt therapy and Alfred Korzybski (including Yalom’s description)**

Gestalt therapy is another approach to worldview. A definition of gestalt therapy is: how does your perception of your environment (people, things, happenings) as a whole affect your behaviour? Korzybski was a key influence on Frederick Perls and Paul Goodman, who originally articulated Gestalt therapy theory, and the primary thinking behind the general semantics movement. Fritz Perls focused primarily on awareness, and his therapy is an “experiential therapy rather than a verbal or interpretative therapy” (Perls, 1973: 63; Yalom, 1980: 308). Irvin Yalom defines gestalt therapy as “a ‘here and now therapy’ in which we ask the patient during the session to turn all his attention to what he is doing in the present, during the course of the session – right here and now ... to become aware of his gestures, of his breathing, of his emotions and of his facial gestures as much as his pressing thoughts” (Yalom, 1980: 308).

### **2.5.2 Cognitive theory**

Behaviour is determined by how a person perceives their social situation; therefore, cognitive therapy focuses on current perceptions and on subjective reality. Cognitive psychology is the study of the mind, its ways and patterns, i.e. memory, perception, language formation and roles of various brain functions (Peltier, 2001: 82). Cognitive therapy helps people to begin to notice

and change their own thought patterns with powerful emotional and behavioural benefits; NLP was based on cognitive behavioural psychology.

### **2.5.3 Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)**

Much of my earlier coaching practice focused on the cognitive behavioural aspect of language. I found Dr. David Lane's introduction of functional analysis very useful.<sup>13</sup> CBT is a combination of cognitive therapy (which can modify or eliminate unwanted thoughts and beliefs) and behavioural therapy, which aims to help the individual change their behaviour in response to those thoughts. Not dissimilar to Nancy Kline's thinking partnership, CBT is based on the assumption that most unwanted thinking patterns, emotional and behavioural reactions are learned. CBT helps clients to develop and find alternative and more constructive viewpoints to tackle their problems.

The aim is to identify the thinking that is causing the unwanted feelings and behaviours and to enable learning to replace this thinking with thoughts that lead to a more desirable response. The lectures and work with David Lane enhanced my understanding of cognitive behavioural theories, and provided more tools with which to work at the level of intervention within the coaching conversation. It ultimately led me to work with Nancy Kline's thinking process of overturning limiting assumptions, particularly bedrock limiting assumptions. Positioned in the centre of my coaching model is the I-coach framework (input/throughput/output); tools and techniques (for example, CBT's functional analysis) are positioned in 'throughput', the second stage of the I-T-O process (see model, Appendix 4).

### **2.5.4 Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP)**

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) is used as a specific body of cognitive tools; NLP is underpinned by the work of Milton H. Erickson and Gregory Bateson. Erickson, an influential hypnotherapist, invented the non-conventional "Ericksonian Hypnosis". Erickson influenced the two primary founders of NLP (John Grinder and Richard Bandler).

NLP involves an understanding of the mental and cognitive processes behind behaviour. It provides tools and skills for the development of communication and for the process of change. In NLP, a word is not what it represents, a word does not represent all of the facts, and language is self-reflexive in the sense that in language we can speak about language (the map is not the territory). Hence in coaching, the coach is listening 'underneath the content of the words' for implicit meaning.<sup>14</sup>

The key underpinnings of NLP are: linguistics, gestalt therapy, family therapy, cognitive theory and social psychology (the scientific study of how people think about, influence and



relate to others; social psychology studies issues on an interpersonal level). The NLP analysis of language is that most people think by talking to themselves (see endnote 8).

### **2.5.5 NLP communication skills model**

The NLP communication model is one of the very first models I began to work with when I began coaching in London in the early 1990s. In fact, I developed an NLP Coaching Skills workshop with a colleague, Min McLoughlin in 2004. The workshop is one of three coaching skills workshops that I have designed during the doctoral research. For those unfamiliar with NLP terminology, NLP refers to neuro, linguistic, and programming (see endnotes 7 and 14).

#### **2.5.5.1 The five success factors**

The five success factors that NLP is based upon are useful to the coach. They are: rapport; know your outcome; take action; have sensory acuity; have behavioural flexibility; and operate from a physiology and psychology of excellence. They are not dissimilar to some of the basic tenets of coaching described by John Whitmore, Laura Whitworth and Robert Hargrove.

Peter McNab has successfully integrated Ken Wilber's integral four-quadrant model with NLP in his recent book, *Towards an Integral Vision* (2005). In this work he introduces a wide range of models, but more specifically maps out an integral approach to communication and dialogue by synthesising the NLP approach to communication with Wilber's "all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types" AQAL model (McNab, 2005).

### **2.5.6 Motivational theories (part of cognitive theory)**

Motivational theories primarily focus on the individual's needs and motivations. I have historically worked with coaching clients to help them more fully understand their intrinsic motivators (internal drivers such as values, beliefs and feelings) and how to use extrinsic motivators (external drivers such as relationships, bonuses, environment, titles) to motivate their team. Throughout my doctoral research, I have continued to develop my understanding of limiting assumptions which create anxiety and prevent the client from making decisions, or interfere with self-belief, self-esteem, self-management and social, interpersonal management and understanding how to work effectively within a system (such as the work environment). How I work has also changed as my model has evolved. Initially I took copious notes during the coaching session; currently I make reflective notes after the session rather than taking my eyes off the client, often dictating my reflections to be typed up later.

### **2.5.7 Brain-based learning (part of cognitive theory)**

Brain-based learning is another complex subject, but is primarily based on the structure and function of the brain. Learning engages the whole physiology, and understanding is best when facts are embedded in natural, spatial memory. I devoted two chapters in my recent book (2002) to motivation, creative thinking and the brain; these chapters are largely informed by the writings and research of Robert Sperry, Howard Gardner, Edward de Bono, Betty Edwards, Daniel Goleman, Candace Pert, Colin Rose and Ned Herrmann. Ned Herrmann's four stages of whole-brain business thinking include four thinking styles: rational, organised, personalised and experimental. His model of quadernity influenced my earliest model of coaching (Herrmann, 1996).

### **2.5.8 Attitudes**

Attitudes (cognitive representations of an evaluation of oneself, other people, events and ideas) and attitude change have been a central concern in social psychology since the discipline began. People can and do have attitudes on an infinite range of things – but what are attitudes, how do we form them, and how can they be modified (if necessary) as a result of the coaching conversation?

My work has continually focused on how language impacts on our attitudes. My coaching model and the individual coaching conversations with my clients generally move to uncover limiting paradigms, or limiting assumptions, that hold them back and influence their attitude towards themselves and others.

### **2.5.9 Analytical psychology (Jung)**

Jung's analytical psychology concerns itself with the archetypal foundations of myths and folktales. The terms individuation, archetype, extraversion and introversion are based on the psychological model of the relations between conscious and unconscious minds. Jung identified that individuals carry the world in microcosm, and that the personal psyche is embedded in the archetypal psyche (Stevens, 1994). Jung's psychology places emphasis on man's symbolic nature. Due to my work with coaching clients, I have come to believe that coaches are responsible to help clients become conscious of their own unconscious thinking processes and how those impact on their behaviour in the world. My research into the coaching conversation has been to determine exactly that: *How does the coaching intervention create change at the level of thinking, feeling, language and behaviour that ultimately impacts on performance?*

### 2.5.10 Insights management profile

The Insights management profile, known as the Discovery Profile, is based on Jungian archetypes and personality types. I include an example of the Insights model which has impacted my coaching model in Appendix 2, slide 58.<sup>15</sup>

In his pioneering work, *Psychological Types* (1971), Dr Carl G Jung suggested that people have different preferences which give them a different perspective on situations. These different perspectives and “attitudes” are now seen as highly relevant to understanding organisational and cultural requirements and the needs of people in relation to motivation and leadership. The understanding of individual differences that Insights provides is fundamental to improving communication, co-operation and building effective and high-morale teams.

This is the one management profile that I use as a first assessment with new coaching clients. It is designed to provide an individual with an effective map to understand themselves (how they see themselves in the world) and to help them understand their unconscious cognitive and behavioural processes more fully. It also helps them understand other individuals, their differences and how these differences impact on interpersonal relationships in teams, one-to-one relationships, management, leadership, customer relations and more. The Insights Discovery profile is similar to the MBTI (Myers Briggs) profile.

Insights use four colours to represent the energies that interact within the personality as an aid to self-understanding: sunshine yellow, fiery red, cool blue and earth green. Insights have built an extensive body of psychological research, encompassing Carl Jung’s work on personality.

#### 2.5.10.1 *Thinking and feeling (Jung’s rational functions)*

Two key components of the Insights profile are Jung’s rational functions: thinking and feeling (in the north and south of my model). Thinking characteristics are: formal, impersonal, analytical, detached, objective, strong-minded, competitive, task and systems. Feeling characteristics are: informal, personal, considerate, involved, subjective, caring, accommodating, harmonious, relationships and morale.

#### 2.5.10.2 *Sensing and intuition (Jung’s irrational functions)*

Two other components of the Insights profile are sensing and intuition, Jung’s irrational functions. Sensing characteristics are: specific, present-oriented, realistic, persistent, down to earth, practical, precise, factual and step-by-step. Intuitive characteristics are: global, future-oriented, imaginative, inspirational, ideas, conceptual, generalising, abstract and indirect.

### **2.5.11 Process-oriented psychology (POP)**

Process work is an innovative approach to individual and collective change which combines psychology, psychotherapy, bodywork, dreamlike processes and conflict resolution and relationship in group dynamics. POP works with groups, social issues and conflict. It includes Arnold Mindell's model for "Deep Democracy". I wrote a chapter in *Accelerating Performance* (2002) on facilitation with Arnold Mindell's four-stage conflict resolution process of "deep democracy", although I use Mindell's process approach less frequently in facilitating group work today.

In working with process-oriented psychology I have learned to 'trust the process'. In other words, by constantly learning from the process of the 'coaching conversation', I have come to understand that it is crucial for the client to do the thinking – if the coaching model provides a 'safe thinking environment' and a clear, explicit process the client's thinking can develop within the conversation. This leads to the importance of making everything explicit to the client, and the importance of 'relationship' – which I will discuss under existential thought with reference to Ernesto Spinelli (1989) and Irvin Yalom (1980), leading contemporary existential psychotherapists. Nancy Kline's model of the Thinking Environment (1999) has also profoundly influenced my work and the development of my coaching model.

## **2.6 Cultural competency**

Cultural competency is an area that I am committed to exploring further with my work in South Africa and in the UK, Europe and the United States. Cultural competency is awareness, cultural knowledge and understanding of our human differences that may affect our work relationships and our interpersonal relationships. In my work with NLP, I have been influenced by the premise that we work from the basis of similarity, rather than difference, due to the way our brains function. In May 2003, I was introduced to William J. Hunter (organisational and management consultant) at the ASTD American Society for Training and Development International Conference, Washington D.C., where I was also speaking.

Hunter's view is that understanding the basics of cultural competency assists individuals in business, consulting, government and other industries to surface their assumptions about diversity and help them to become more culturally competent. I believe that it is the coach's job to help the client become more culturally competent. The more culturally competent one is, the better decision-maker one becomes. (I will discuss decision-making from an existential viewpoint later.)

Hunter's theory is that you can customise relations with each individual, i.e. talk to each person differently, enhancing your team and leadership effectiveness through improved collaboration, communication and networking across cultures to impact the bottom line in your organisation, and facilitate self-analysis in order to increase awareness about your own individual diversity role within the organisation and industry. This is particularly relevant in South Africa, where we work in a culture with 11 official languages and a broad range of cultural diversity within each major metropolitan area (Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban).

## **2.7 Paradigm plurality**

Paradigm is used to describe a set of experiences, beliefs and values that affect the way an individual perceives reality and responds to that perception. Social scientists have adopted the phrase, paradigm shift, to denote a particular social phenomenon. Kuhn states that "the language and theories of different paradigms cannot be translated into one another or rationally evaluated against one another" (Kuhn, 1977).

This gives rise to the idea of different peoples and cultures having radically different worldviews or conceptual schemes. This is refuted by Donald Davidson (1974) in his essay *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme*, arguing that "the hold of the Kuhnian analysis on social science has long been tenuous with the wide application of multi-paradigmatic approaches in order to understand complex human behaviour" (cited in Hassard, 1993). John Hassard and Mihaela Kelemen of the Manchester School of Management and Keele Universities respectively, argue in their abstract *Paradigm Plurality: Exploring Past, Present and Future Trends* (2005), "that the benefits of paradigm plurality outweigh its shortcomings and that it is important that researchers preserve and encourage theories emerging from multiple paradigmatic viewpoints".

Their article maps out "the development of paradigm plurality in a number of organisational disciplines such as organisation theory, strategic management, international business, and operational research and technology studies".

They state that "the concept of paradigm has increased its significance for contemporary analysis of organisational phenomena, continuing to shape in a direct or indirect way the thinking and approach of most organisational researchers". Hassard says that he defines "paradigm ... as a shared set of views, values and writing conventions around which research communities are being formed". The writers discuss the emergence of paradigm plurality as important due to several factors. Two factors are: "shifts in organisational realities which have

now become more complex and diverse than ever before, and the apparent moral crisis facing the contemporary society”. Hassard and Kelemen say that “by becoming literate in multiple paradigms, researchers can engage more effectively in conversation with other colleagues. This allows them to temporarily detach themselves from a ‘preferred’ view of the world, and engage in exploring new avenues” (Hassard and Kelemen, 2005).

The disadvantages, however, are that “operating across paradigms makes it more difficult to engage in acts of ‘scientific certification’, and that one’s socialisation in one particular paradigm and its reinforcement through existing institutions make it difficult for a researcher to question his/her preconceived ideas about the world, blinding them to a particular vision of the world; and that our acceptance and engagement with plural paradigms does not come in an easy way” (Hassard, 1993). I have based the building of my model on the advantages and importance of the plurality of paradigms, further influenced by Ken Wilber’s four-quadrant model.

## **2.8 Systems of cultural and behavioural change**

Different understandings of reality are held by people in different cultures. In *Creating Paths of Change* (1996), Will McWhinney talks about the link between behaviour and a system of beliefs about reality, distinguished by four archetypal worldviews, or four visions of reality: sensory, social, unitary and mythic realities.

The starting point of McWhinney’s model is that change will always occur from different paradigms or worldviews. In coaching we enable clients to develop competencies and to break through limiting paradigms that prevent change. McWhinney’s four realities provide a “framework to understand change, leadership styles, the relationship between leaders and followers, and the conditions in which change takes place” (McWhinney, 1996: 12).

*Part I has been an exploration of the earliest influences on my coaching model such as linguistics, cognitive and behavioural psychology, systems thinking, paradigmatic plurality and cultural competence.*

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Chapter 2**Terms of Reference and Literature Review*****Part II: Underlying Theory and Philosophy:  
Later Stages of the Coaching Model*****2.9     *Part II - later stages of the coaching model***

Part II is an exploration of the underlying philosophies of existentialism, experiential learning, existential phenomenology, existential psychotherapy, and other influences on my research project and evolving coaching model.

**2.10     *Rollo May and existential being***

The reason for exploring these psychological mechanisms and the history of existentialism is because the existential approach helps us, as coaching practitioners, ask questions about relationship, for example: “how is it possible that one being relates to another?” (May, 1983: 19). Participation involves risk.

According to May, we are faced today with a strange paradox. We are flooded with information from all sides by various media, and still we have little certainty about our own being (May, 1983: 10). Certainty about our being comes from inadequate knowledge or information, that is, from a “false” sense of certainty. Yet, the question is, is lack of certainty necessarily a bad thing? Rollo May believes that it is only by “discovering and affirming our own being” that some inner certainty will be possible (May, 1983: 10). This involves an individual’s journey or search for personal values and purpose.

This is often where I start a coaching session, with an exercise to determine what are the core values, beliefs and feelings that guide or drive this particular client. I introduced this exercise into the Coaching Centre’s foundation programme; it proved to be a powerful experience for the students to come to grips with their own intrinsic drivers, but also provided them with a tool to use in their coaching client sessions to begin to understand their client’s inner world.<sup>16</sup>

### **2.10.1 Anxiety and existential therapy**

May talks about the affinity and yet aversion to existential therapy in the United States. He suggests that in the U.S. there is an affinity to William James's emphasis on the "immediacy of experience, the unity of thought and action, and the importance of decision and commitment" (May, 1983: 13).

The concept of anxiety posits that anxiety is the struggle of the living "being" against "non-being". There were two original tracts on anxiety: one by Kierkegaard and one by Freud. According to Freud, anxiety is firstly the re-emergence of the repressed libido, and secondly anxiety is the ego's reaction to the threat of the loss of the loved object (May, 1983: 14).

May, Kierkegaard, Freud and Nietzsche all portray what is immediately experienced by human beings in crisis. Kierkegaard, Freud and Nietzsche "based their knowledge chiefly on the analysis of one case – namely themselves" (May, 1983: 69). Freud wrote on a technical level with supreme genius: he knew about anxiety; Kierkegaard wrote from an existential, ontological level: he also knew anxiety personally (May, 1983: 14-15).

According to May, in the western world we have managed to dominate nature, but in the process we have repressed the sense of being – the ontological being. Karl Jaspers, psychiatrist and existentialist philosopher, said that the western world was in danger of actually losing self-consciousness (May, 1983: 15).

May questions whether we overemphasise the concern all human beings have with safety and security; this suggests an over-concern with the bottom level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968). May agrees more with Nietzsche and Kierkegaard when they describe man as placing more importance on values such as prestige, power and tenderness (May, 1983: 17).

### **2.10.2 Relationships – transference**

In the end May defines anxiety as the "patient's fear of his own powers, and the conflicts that arise from that fear" (May, 1983: 17). He takes a second look at psychology's understanding of the mechanism of "repression" (which Freud defined in many different ways) and redefines as the "complex struggle of the individual's being against the possibility of non-being" (May, 1983: 18). Rollo May also looks at "transference", another psychological mechanism which refers to the relationship between two people (which I view in this research project as client and coach rather than patient and therapist).



As May describes it, the patient brings into the consulting room previous or present relationships with others (mother, father, partner, children, work colleagues, friends) and perceives the practitioner as similar to those beings, thus building his or her world with the practitioner in the same way. From a systems point of view, the practitioner simply becomes another part of the system within which the client exists.

This is an important concept for the executive coach who often works with clients in a corporate environment; the coach needs to stay aware at all times of the system within which the client works, so that the coach does not become simply part of that system.

Freud emphasises how deeply we are bound to each other: “We live in others and they in us” (May, 1983: 18). May comments that the therapist can hide behind the concept of transference to protect him or herself from the client’s anxiety, but the concept of transference can undermine the entire experience and reality of therapy and “rob the client of the sense of responsibility” (May, 1983: 19).

May talks about the ‘organisation man’; this is not too far off the mark for corporate executives who live, eat and breathe their work, deriving their identity from their position, power and status inside the organisation and society at large. May calls this the “outer-directed man” who conforms and disperses him or herself to such a degree, and participates and identifies so much with others that their own being is emptied.

### **2.10.3 The relationship**

May defines the German term, *Mitwelt*, to mean “with world”, the world of interpersonal relations.<sup>17</sup> Relationships between two people take place on many different levels from one human being to another, to friendship where we trust our friend will listen with interest and understanding (Kline, 2005), to the “self-transcending concern for another’s welfare” (May, 1983: 21) such as parent to child, or partner to partner; or even that of sexual relationship. Where May says that the ‘erotic’ is one of the many ways of communicating in therapy, Yalom in *The Gift of Therapy* says that one must never be sexual with patients, and not to confuse therapeutic intimacy with sexual intimacy (Yalom, 2001: 191-4).

### **2.10.4 The encounter**

So, encounter can cause both joy and anxiety, but it is essentially a creative experience. According to Jung, change must occur in both client and practitioner otherwise the therapy will not be effective (May, 1983: 22).

May suggests that the phenomena of encounter must be studied as “it is not possible for one person to have a feeling without the other having it to some degree also” (May, 1983: 23). In some ways, there is a case here for all coaches to have a theoretical understanding of cognitive behavioural psychology, as well as systems theory (including family systems theory) in order to understand some of the mechanics of “relationship” that happen within the helping professions. It is for this very reason that in South Africa the establishment of COMENSA and the development of academic programmes for trainee coaches and mentors is so crucial.<sup>18</sup>

The client must never be burdened by the feelings and problems of the coaching practitioner (in the same way as the therapist is trained to bracket personal “distortions and neurotic tendencies ... and be able to experience encounter as a way of participating in the feelings and the world of the patient” (May, 1983: 23).

May believes that we have not studied “encounter” because it was usurped by Freud’s notion of transference. Instead we do not know what really goes on between two human beings in relationship. For this very reason, and in alignment with Ernesto Spinelli’s and Irvin Yalom’s suggestion that the relationship is the ultimate determinant of success in the client/practitioner relationship, I believe that the “encounter” between coach and client is where the real work is done. Thus my research into the coaching intervention is specifically to investigate and analyse the “encounter”.<sup>19</sup>

The term *Dasein* coined by Husserl means “the being who is there” (May, 1983: 25). May suggested six essential ontological characteristics for the “existing person” or the “one to whom these experiences happen” (May, 1983: 25; 26-33):

1. Being centred in oneself (the method the individual uses to preserve his own centre, his own existence).
2. Every existing person has the character of ‘self-affirmation’ or the need to preserve this centeredness. Paul Tillich called this ‘courage’ (May, 1983: 79).
3. All existing persons have the need and possibility of going out from their centeredness to participate in other beings.
4. Awareness is the subjective side of centeredness.
5. Self-consciousness is the uniquely human form of awareness. Here May talks about ‘insight’ or inward sight, seeing the world and its problems ‘in relation’ to oneself and recognising that one’s originality and uniqueness implies that one must be prepared to be isolated.
6. Anxiety is the state of the human being in the struggle against what would destroy his being (for Tillich this represented the state of a being in conflict with non-being; Freud mythologically pictured this as an important symbol of the death instinct).

Self-confrontation is needed to accept self-consciousness. As May says “consciousness itself implies always the possibility of turning against oneself, denying oneself” (May, 1983: 33). And “herein lies the ‘tragedy’ of human existence: the fact that consciousness itself involves the possibility and temptation at every instant of killing itself” (May, 1983: 34).

Existential psychology has grown out of the awareness that serious gaps exist in our way of understanding human beings. It sought to analyse the structure of human existence to “understand the reality underlying all situations of human beings in crisis” (May, 1983: 44). In the United States there was resistance to the existential movement for two reasons: firstly, it was assumed that all major discoveries had been made in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy and psychiatry; and secondly, existentialism was considered to be a philosophical encroachment into psychiatry (May, 1983: 45).

Although the existential movement in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy developed with a zeal to be more not less empirical, it also acknowledged that “human beings reveal themselves in art and literature and philosophy, and by profiting from the insights of the particular cultural movements which express the anxiety and conflicts of contemporary man” (May, 1983: 45).

The third area of resistance in the USA to existentialism was the most crucial according to Rollo May (1983). May describes it as the pragmatic tendency to be preoccupied with technique and for active concern in helping and changing people.

#### **2.10.5 What is existentialism?**

Much confusion surrounds the terms ‘existentialist’ and ‘existentialism’. May describes it as the “unique and specific portrayal of the psychological predicament of contemporary Western man” (May, 1983: 49). Sartre is the philosophical and literary figure most called to mind when the existentialist movement is referred to, although he represents an extreme and is more known for his plays and novels rather than psychological analyses. Sartre contributed phenomenological descriptions of psychological processes (May, 1983: 55). May defines existentialism as:

“Existentialism, in short, is the endeavour to understand man by cutting below the cleavage between subject and object which has bedevilled Western thought and science since shortly after the Renaissance” (May, 1983: 49).

The tradition began and continued from thinkers as diverse as Socrates and his dialogues, to Augustine and his depth-psychological analyses of the self, Pascal in trying to find a place for

“the heart’s reasons which the reason knows not of”, Kierkegaard’s protest against rationalism, and Hegel’s “totalitarianism of reason” (May: 1983: 50).

The existential approach is dynamic, and existence refers to coming into being or becoming (the term existence comes from the Latin root *ex-sistere* which means to ‘stand out or emerge’). The existentialists do not rule out other studies, dynamism, drives or patterns of behaviour. Their main endeavour though remains that of trying to understand the “fundamental structure of human existence” (May, 1983: 50).

Basically concerned with ontology or the science of being – existentialism is based on the underlying fact that “you and I alone must face the fact that at some unknown moment in the future we shall die” (May, 1983: 51).

The crucial question in psychology is the gap between what is existentially true and what is abstractly true for the client. Kierkegaard and the existential thinkers appealed to the reality underlying both subjectivity and objectivity.

#### **2.10.6 Three phases of existentialism**

The development of existentialism is useful to us in terms of research into the relationship between coach and client.

In 1844 Kierkegaard wrote the first declaration of existentialism (phase one); in the 1880s a new impetus came from the work of Dilthey, Nietzsche and Bergson (phase two). In the third phase after World War I, Kierkegaard and the early Karl Marx were rediscovered; this phase was particularly influenced by Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology — followed by Heidegger who is considered to have laid the foundations for contemporary existential thought (May, 1983: 54-55).

The literary, philosophical and artistic response to modern cultural crises influenced the advent of existentialism (i.e., the novels of Franz Kafka: *The Trial*, *The Castle*). Even the existential link with psychotherapy displays a concern with individuals in crisis.

May discusses the link between existentialist and Oriental thought. For example in Lao Tzu’s *The Way of Life*: “existence is beyond the power of words to define: terms may be used but none of them is absolute”. Zen Buddhism and existentialism are “both concerned with ontology, the study of being; both seek a relation to reality which cuts below the cleavage between subject and object” (May, 1983: 59).

May suggests that existentialism seeks to overcome the split between subject and object – stating that it is something from which eastern philosophers never suffered. However, this is somewhat of a generalisation. For example, the Hindu philosophy of Samkhya admits two basic metaphysical principles, *purusha* (soul) and *prakriti* (materiality). The divide here is not exactly between Subject and Object (as in the Kantian divide), but it is an oriental philosophy that departs from a split between the *sensorial* (the world, which includes some modes of intellectual *apperception*) and the *supra-sensorial* (the transcendental self). Sartre’s novel, *Nausea*, is concerned with precisely that split (Roquentin is constantly aware that the inanimate objects and situations remain indifferent to his existence). The question here is that the relationship (if any) between Roquentin himself (subject) and the things (objects) is *meaningless*. However, the split remains in place.

But, again aligned to psychoanalysis, existentialism doesn’t seek answers from other cultures. Rather it uses conflicts in the contemporary personality as a route to “find the solutions to our problems in direct relation to the historical and cultural crises which gave the problems birth” (May, 1983: 59).

## **2.11 Spinelli’s existential phenomenology**

These thoughts are based on my reading of Ernesto Spinelli, my supervision session with him in London on 6th April 2004, and his I-coach lecture in Cape Town on 8th February 2005. My notes are reflections on Spinelli’s lecture and its relevance to coaching.

In his lecture, Spinelli describes his original background in psychotherapy and counselling – with a psychotherapy approach rooted in phenomenological thinking. He talks about the evolving interest in coaching within the last ten years in the field of psychotherapy. His work is with a group that is currently exploring the relevance of methods evolved in existential therapy but have relevance to coaching. The quotes in Sections 2.11.1-2.11.10 below are from his 2004 I-Coach lecture.

### **2.11.1 Being vs. doing**

“At the moment we inhabit a culture which places tremendous importance on expectations. A group is growing in numbers, who are seen as “experts-in-living” and who are working with clients. We need our clients to see us as experts, but if someone asks ‘what is your expertise?’, our tendency is to translate expertise in terms of skills, competencies, specialist knowledge, certain forms of personality tests. Our primary focus is ‘doing’ - experts do. Doing is where expertise can be demonstrated.

“Existentialism challenges the notion of expertise as ‘doing’ and reconsiders expertise from the point of view of ‘being’. The question then becomes, ‘How is it that I *am* with other human beings, with other living beings, with living and non living objects?

“The basic idea is this, that the way I reveal myself with other beings or the world in general exposes not only that moment of being, but gives a sense of totality – that individual’s general stance towards reality. How I am with you reveals how I am, not only to you, but to myself, to others and to the world in general. Therefore, if you can stay with the way a person is when they engage with you (like a hologram) you can see the whole, general stance of relating to ‘self’ and to ‘others’ in the world in general”.

### **2.11.2 It is the relationship**

‘Relationship’ is the variable to consider in terms of the expertise a coach may have. Spinelli challenges our view about ‘relationship’ by saying that it has taken psychotherapists 100 years to analyse the particular skills that determine the effectiveness of a therapeutic environment and the outcomes of therapy.

“There are more than 400 therapeutic models in existence. Over the last 40 to 50 years, an effort has been carried out to determine which approach to psychotherapy is the best, which approach has the best outcome, which approach has the best impact on the client”.

There are still many models vying for attention. Spinelli’s analysis is that we need to move away from ‘doing’ to an authenticity which will take the coach straight to the ‘heart’ of the relationship between the coach and the client. This is of particular significance to coaches because no matter what model or methodology a practitioner uses, it is, according to Spinelli, ‘the relationship’ that affects the outcome of the coaching or therapy. It is the ‘quality’ of the relationship that is of importance.

### **2.11.3 Value of existentialism**

In Spinelli’s lecture he looked at the three movements of coaching (which he called ‘welding processes’). He looked at coaching from an existential point of view and in particular at the difference between ‘being’ and ‘doing’. Obviously, the coach tends to be more action-oriented than a therapist; the coach can therefore fall into a ‘doing dominance’ focused on tasks. Spinelli suggests these three movements are the place where coach and client meet.

### **2.11.4 Three distinct phases**

1. *Co-creation*: the co-creation of a particular and special relational world.

2. *Exploration*: exploration of this world and what are its possibilities at the level of relationship.
3. *Closing down and opening*: the closing down of one relational world and the opening of another (in terms of professional and personal levels of interaction).

This is reminiscent of Yalom, who advocates bringing the conversation round time and time again to the relationship between therapist and client: “therapists must convey to the patient that their paramount task is to build a relationship together that will itself become the agent of change” (Yalom, 2001: 34-5).

#### **2.11.5 Co-creation – first welding level**

For the coach the question is ‘what is the work to be done and how should it be constructed?’ The second question is ‘what does the coach bring that is absolutely fundamental and vital?’

#### **2.11.6 Contracting the relationship**

The contract leverages the entire relationship, and according to Spinelli, the contract creates a set of conditions or framework within which the coach can work. The coach then agrees to conditions of time, space, fees and goals.

By contracting the coach agrees to a set of conditions, for example: “I am dependable; I will not deviate (unlike other relationships); I will keep to our agreement or the basic structure which we agree together”. According to Spinelli, contracting is deeply challenging to our normal way of ‘being’ in the world; we normally just ‘do’ without agreeing the parameters of the relationship. This is borne out with the students with whom I work; engendering the habit of both formal and informal contracting is one of the first steps in beginning to understand the dynamics of formulating a coaching relationship.

The purpose of the contract is to open up the potential for trust between coach and client. This is essential for the client to trust his/her own self-exploration. The agreement lays the groundwork, but must be adhered to in action for trust to develop.

#### **2.11.7 Levels of listening**

Spinelli says that his three levels of listening are mental, emotional and physical. For example, as a coach when you intervene in the conversation with the client, what of *you* is in your question, in your statement, in your intervention? How can you as coach be open in the way you ask questions, intervene, or ask for clarification? As coach you are asking to understand,

and as Spinelli says, “to understand more clearly the coach needs to open up” and literally unpack the client’s statements.

#### **2.11.8 The coach’s intervention**

Although Spinelli’s intervention is: “In order for me to draw out your meaning from your statement, the one thing I cannot do (at this point) is to get you to consider alternatives, because that would move you away too quickly and get in the way of the establishment of a trusting relationship”. I do not necessarily agree. The coach may only have between one and six sessions to work with the client; therefore, it may be necessary in the very first meeting to encourage the client to look at alternatives.

In the first stage, the primary task of the coach is to engender trust and to stay with and descriptively open up what is there for the client (in terms of their current lived relationships). According to Spinelli, once the client experiences a growing sense of trust, entry into the second movement can be made. I believe, based on my research, that the second movement can actually begin in the very first session with the client.

#### **2.11.9 Exploration – second welding level**

The second movement emphasises the ‘weld’ or welding together of coach and client, and can be a deeply significant relationship. If only because the client experiences an opening up of the relationship, which cannot be achieved in the wider world that he/she inhabits. A place is created for ‘playfulness’ to explore issues and concerns.

In this second stage, the client and coach can each explore the relationship, even playfully. In other words, the client can explore alternative modes of relating. The relationship between coach and client is a living experience, and as the relationship develops so can playfulness between client and coach.

Traditionally in therapy the ‘relationship’ between therapist and client is explored; in coaching this is a radical new thought. Most coaches focus on the relationships the client has in the outside world.

#### **2.11.10 Closing down and opening – third welding level**

In the third stage (or movement in Spinelli’s terms) the client indicates a readiness to take on something learned in the second movement, taking it out into the wider relational world. The client has found the courage to test possibilities, and in this sense it is the closing down of the relationship.



The coach becomes the voice of others rather than trying to stay with the voice of the client. The coach tries to be ‘the other’ or to be representative of the client’s world of others. Thus the coach challenges the client in what they wish to take out to the wider world. This may be from the perspective of others, for example, arriving at a decision or wanting to act in a certain way. The coach’s intervention could be: “So how do you anticipate your colleagues are going to respond to you? How is this choice or decision you have arrived at going to have an impact on your relationship?”

This takes the relationship out to the wider world of interpersonal relationships. Spinelli’s ideas resonate with my model of coaching because I tend to look at the coaching process from the perspective of the three stages of input/throughput/output; in other words:

1. Input: issues / discussion / menu of topics;
2. Throughput: interventions / questions / techniques and tools / relationship development; and
3. Output: outcomes / resolutions / insights / goals / summary / conclusion / exit strategy.

What is at the heart of the coaching process, irrespective of the model or approach, does seem to be the relationship. This means that it isn’t necessarily about ‘doing’ for the client, but more about ‘being’ for the client — creating trust, a safe environment, where thinking, feeling and insight can take place. This opens up the relationship to the wider, over-arching parameters within which the coaching conversation takes place.

Spinelli suggests that the coach is there to: attend, listen, embrace, accept, play and explore. Most importantly, the coach is there to seek the ‘wider relational’ space (Spinelli’s term). Spinelli suggests the coach’s wish or motivation to coach should be aligned to a “deeply human desire to engage with others, to challenge, and finally to provide an alternative as much of value to oneself as to the client”.

This is similar to Yalom who posits that if “the therapist doesn’t change, then the patient doesn’t either” (Yalom, 2001: 107).

## **2.12 Existential psychotherapy (Yalom)**

Irvin Yalom (1980: 265) describes five items in the ‘existential research category’ in psychotherapy:

1. Recognising that life is at times unfair and unjust.
2. Recognising that ultimately there is no escape from some of life’s pain and from death.
3. Recognising that no matter how close I get to other people, I must still face life alone.

4. Facing the basic issues of my life and death, and thus living my life more honestly and being less caught up in trivialities.
5. Learning that I must take ultimate responsibility for the way I live my life no matter how much guidance and support I get from others.

The fifth item (responsibility) was ranked highest in importance in a research study of patients who had completed their therapy (Yalom, 1980: 266). In executive coaching, encouraging the client to take responsibility for their decisions is what helps to create change at the level of thinking, feeling and behaviour. Personal responsibility in executive coaching terms is a key business principle, without which both teams and individuals can fail. Taking responsibility is a key stage in my coaching model.

### **2.12.1 Personal responsibility and awareness**

Yalom asks whether psychotherapy increases responsibility awareness and whether that is helpful. As a coach, one of my first areas of focus is *awareness*: awareness of where the client is in the present moment, and helping that individual to accept personal responsibility to create change for him or herself. How the client takes up responsibility for change emerges from the coaching conversation.

Yalom describes the ‘locus of control’ which measures, at a superficial level, whether an individual accepts personal responsibility for his or her behaviour and life experiences; or whether the individual believes that what happens to him or her is unrelated to personal behaviour and is therefore beyond personal control. Individuals who accept responsibility are considered to have an “internal” locus of control, and those who reject it have an “external” locus of control (Yalom, 1980: 262).

In my coaching model, the assumption of personal responsibility is a key step towards growth, achieving professional goals and creating desired personal change – personally and professionally. Yet another question arises: how directive should the coach be, and what is required by coaching clients with an internal locus of control vs. an external locus of control? Should the model account for both?

In coaching, as perceived within this framework, we are not looking to judge whether an internal or external locus of control is better or worse for the client. Instead, within the relationship we look to help the individual assume responsibility for ‘what is working, what is not working, and what if anything can be done differently’. Within the realm of my new executive coaching model, the coach is helping the client to reflect, develop awareness; understand what flexibility the client has in a situation; and to take responsibility and make

choices based on these reflections. The coach is not trained to ‘change’ a client’s locus of control; only to help the client become aware of choices which can be made, and to make those choices and to carry them out. If the locus of control changes as a result of the work with the coach, that may be beneficial to the client.

### **2.12.2 Relationship and the limits of responsibility**

The flip side of relationship is its limits: “One discovers the limits of relatedness: that is, what one cannot get from others, in therapy and in life as well” (Yalom, 1980: 267). In “a study of Carl Rogers, a non-directive interviewer, and Albert Ellis, an extremely active directive interviewer”, it was “found that individuals with an external locus of control preferred directive, behavioural therapists, while those with an internal locus of control preferred nondirective, analytic therapists ... the problem for patients with responsibility avoidance (that is, with an external locus of control) is that the choice of an active-directive therapist may be self-defeating: the control requested is not the control required” (Yalom, 1980: 267).

“The concept of responsibility is crucial to psychotherapy; acceptance of it enables the individual to achieve autonomy and his or her full potential” (Yalom, 1980: 268).

### **2.12.3 Attitude, guilt, and potential**

“A full acceptance of responsibility implies not only that one imbues the world with significance but also that one has the freedom and the responsibility to change one’s external environment whenever possible” (Yalom, 1980: 272). Yalom takes the position that one’s attitude toward one’s situation is the very crux of being human, and that we are responsible for the attitude we assume toward our burden (Yalom, 1980: 272-275).

Yalom names guilt, particularly existential guilt, as the shadow of responsibility. Yalom defines existential guilt as: “one is guilty not only through transgressions against another or against some moral or social code, but one may be guilty of transgression against oneself” (Yalom, 1980: 277). Heidegger says that being guilty has the same significance as responsibility, so “guilt is thus related to possibility or potentiality” (Yalom, 1980: 277).

Tillich’s view that man “is asked to make of himself what he is supposed to become, to fulfil his destiny” derives from Kierkegaard who described despair as not being willing to be oneself (May, 1983: 79). Self-reflection or awareness of guilt tempers the despair, and Rollo May suggested that “the concept of the unconscious be enlarged to include the individual’s unrealised repressed potential; that the individual cannot or will not actualise” (Yalom, 1980: 278).

“One senses the existence of one’s potential self, however, and, at an unconscious level, continuously compares with one’s “actual” self (that is, the self that actually lives in the world) (Yalom, 1980: 279). Maslow used the term self-actualisation, and “believed that individuals naturally actualise themselves unless circumstances in their development are so adverse that they must strive for safety rather than for growth” (Yalom, 1980: 280). According to Yalom, when a person denies or fails to fulfil his or her potential, the resultant condition is guilt, i.e. existential guilt.

Yalom says the therapist’s job is to distinguish between real guilt, neurotic guilt and existential guilt. The coach’s job, if the coach is to work primarily with existential guilt and anxiety which arise out of limiting assumptions, is how to help the client to achieve their potential, by developing an awareness of their existential guilt, or put more simply, an awareness of limiting assumptions and limiting worldviews or paradigms. I quote from a recent novel *My Shadow* (Rostron, 2002) about a law-abiding citizen arrested for an unspecified crime and kept under house-arrest:

“Yes, I remember a time, and it seems like only yesterday, when I was considered by all the citizens of this small town to be blameless, without having to so much as think about it, without even having to prove my virtue. Now the whole town’s pointing accusingly at me, and the worst thing is that I, without knowing why, feel guilty” (Rostron, 2004: 20).

Every behaviour is based on an assumption; therefore the validity of one’s assumptions play an important role in determining how one goes forward, how one steps into the present as much as into the future.

#### **2.12.4 My contemporary model**

Assuming responsibility is the first step towards change and the second step is taking action. This is reflected in my current model which posits four steps: reflection and awareness (of the freedom to stay where one is or to move on); responsibility assumption (finding meaning); setting goals and taking action (making choices); and finally growth and change (reflecting anxiety on the journey) (see Appendix 4). “Change is the business of psychotherapy, and “awareness of responsibility is ... the first step in the process of change” (Yalom, 1980: 286).

Yalom talks about “personality change” only in so far as it leads a patient to adopt a new “mode of behaviour”. As an executive coach I talk about creating change in thinking, feeling and behaviour that ultimately impacts on performance in the workplace. This then is the business of coaching. In a sense, the therapist and the coach work towards similar goals, except that the coach doesn’t delve into the patterns, i.e. the why’s and wherefore’s of the client’s past. Yalom says that, “change (that is, action) is every therapist’s secret quarry ... but that

nowhere in training does the therapist learn about the mechanics of change” (Yalom, 1980: 287).

### **2.12.5 Change, action, and assumptions**

The mechanics of change are exactly what the coach should be schooled in – in alignment with the client’s internal motivators and drivers – and with particular emphasis on how to set goals that help the client to create change and move forward. The coach’s job is not only to create present moment awareness that encompasses the experience of the past, and the desired goals for the future – the coach’s job is to encourage change and action.

According to Yalom, “the goal of psychotherapy is to bring the patient to the point where he can make a free choice” (Yalom, 1980: 288). The goal of coaching is to help the client to become aware of what his or her choices are.

The assumption in coaching is that the client comes to coaching with a reasonably healthy mental life, and that the client is already aware that there is a large degree of free choice available to him or her. In my coaching model, it is primarily individual limiting assumptions (not yet made explicit) that may stop the client from knowing how to make and put into action his or her choices. These individual assumptions also impact on the team’s limiting assumptions. Teams have become the primary force inside organisations; the collective minds of the team members are the fundamental core of the organisation (Kline, 2000: 100-101).<sup>20</sup>

### **2.12.6 Transformation – personality vs. performance**

The therapist’s work is undoubtedly a process of transformation – but more at the level of personality. From my stance, coaches work at the level of thinking, feeling and behaviour as it impacts on performance. Intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships are impacted, and goals and action steps are agreed during the coaching conversation to create the desired changes. In coaching, change occurs at the level of thinking and feeling – but is made explicit through cognitive insight and a developing awareness of limiting assumptions and specific goals that can be achieved.

Fritz Perls began to work with client awareness, and his three fundamental questions were: “What are you doing? What do you feel? What do you want” (Yalom, 1980: 308)? In my coaching model, the three core questions are:

- What’s working?
- What’s not working?
- What if anything can you think or do differently?

### 2.12.7 Awareness, making a decision, and insight

Yalom describes decision as a boundary situation, not dissimilar to an awareness of death as a boundary situation: “To be fully aware of one’s existential situation means that one becomes aware of self-creation” and “decision, insofar as it forces one to accept personal responsibility and existential isolation, threatens one’s belief in the existence of an ultimate rescuer; decision is a lonely act, and it is our own act” (Yalom, 1980: 319).

Such a shift is a prerequisite for authentic existence which can “also call forth anxiety” (Yalom, 1980: 319). Decision forces one to accept personal responsibility and existential isolation creates anxiety.

Yalom “defined existential guilt as arising from one’s transgressions against oneself; ... existential guilt ... may be a powerful decision-blocking factor ... if one accepts responsibility for one’s life situation and makes the decision to change, the implication is that one alone is responsible for the past wreckage of one’s life and could have changed long ago” (Yalom, 1980: 320). William James described five types of decision (Yalom, 1980: 316):

- Reasonable decision;
- Wilful decision;
- Drifting decision;
- Impulsive decision;
- Decision based on change of perspective.

The exact relationship between decision to change and insight is hard to define. Insight is defined by Webster as an instance of apprehending the true nature of a thing, especially through intuitive understanding, or penetrating discernment. In its broadest sense, Yalom says that insight refers to self-discovery, an inward sighting. Yalom asks if insight is always necessary, answering in the negative. I would ask if insight is always needed in the coaching conversation to create change. Yalom explains that “once having made a decision ... one has constituted one’s world differently and is able to seize truths that one had previously hidden from oneself” (Yalom, 1980: 339).

Insight is a tool or a catalyst for change used by both therapists and coaches. Yalom argues that insight effects change by: (1) facilitating the development of the therapist-patient relationship; (2) a series of manoeuvres to help the therapist liberate the patient’s stifled will; and “these manoeuvres enable patients to realise that only they can change the world they have created; that there is no danger in change; that to get what they really want they must change; and that each individual has the power to change” (Yalom, 1980: 339).

Similar to Spinelli, Yalom insists that “the real agent of change” is the “therapeutic relationship” (Yalom, 1980: 340). Yalom’s stance is that change can happen in a therapeutic relationship with four insights (Yalom, 1980: 340):

- Only I can change the world I have created.
- There is no danger in change.
- To get what I really want, I must change.
- I have the power to change.

### **2.12.8 Past vs. present vs. future**

Yalom argues that “psychotherapy is successful to the extent that it allows the patient to alter his or her future. Yet it is not the future but the past tense that dominates psychotherapy literature” (Yalom, 1980). According to Yalom psychotherapists often believe that to provide insight the therapist must relate the present event to some past situation. The therapist may explain a patient’s behaviour by examining conscious and unconscious motivations which currently affect that individual. Yalom incisively asks, “where does the ability to change come from if we are determined by the past?”

Most therapists take the position that the client’s circumstances were beyond their control when a child; but paradoxically the therapy sessions offer release from the past, yet appeal to the client to take responsibility for the future. Yalom suggests existential therapists tend to focus less on the past and more on the future than other therapists; and that although it is important to learn to forgive oneself many individuals take on too much responsibility and guilt for the actions and feelings of others. Finally, Yalom reiterates that “the real agent of change” is “the therapeutic relationship ... and the past is explored in order to facilitate and deepen the present relationship” (Yalom, 1980: 350).

Coaching, different to therapy, explores the present in order to go into the future. The past can be touched on for insight but is not probed in the same depth as in a therapeutic relationship. It is critical that the coach is trained to recognise when the client should be referred for therapy. Bruce Peltier (2001) defines counselling as personal and aimed at personal problems; he indicates that coaching carries a more positive implication in the corporate world. Peltier says that contemporary psychotherapy literature is relevant and invaluable for executive coaches because it is systems-oriented, and draws from the models of humanistic, existential, behavioural and psychodynamic psychology to help executives develop themselves and become more effective (Peltier, 2001: ix-xx). Another viewpoint is that coaching can be seen as probing or exploring, where Yalom defines psychotherapy, similar to Freud, as excavation.

### 2.12.9 The throw-ins

In *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980) Yalom talks about the “throw-ins” that make all the difference in successful therapy. These “throw-ins” are just as relevant in executive coaching. What are they? Yalom believes that, when no one is looking, “the therapist throws in the ‘real thing’ like a chef” (Yalom, 1980: 3). These throw-ins, off-the-record extras, are not written about, studied or even explicitly taught. Therapists and coaches may not even be aware of them. Most therapists, according to Yalom, cannot explain why many patients get better. The critical “throw-ins” or ingredients are qualities such as “compassion, presence, caring, extending oneself, touching the patient at a profound level, or – that most elusive one of all – wisdom” (Yalom, 1980: 4).

Yalom proposes that Freud’s extras were powerful interventions and that to exclude them from psychological theory would be erroneous. Yalom explains that the purpose of his book is to explain a structural approach to psychotherapy that provides a framework and a series of techniques to encompass those ‘throw-ins’ or extras of therapy. He defines ‘existential psychotherapy’ as a dynamic approach to therapy which focuses on concerns that are rooted in the individual’s existence (Yalom, 1980: 5).

Similar to Spinelli, Yalom also claims that it is the ‘relationship that heals’ regardless of the ideology used by the therapist; that clients are tormented by choice; that the therapist must catalyse the client’s will to act; and that the majority of patients are plagued by a lack of meaning in their lives (Yalom, 1980: 5). He believes that existential psychotherapy is a form of dynamic psychotherapy – dynamic as in Freud’s model of mental functioning, i.e. there are “forces in conflict within the individual, and that thought, emotion, and behaviour, both adaptive and psychopathological, are the resultant of these conflicting forces ... these forces exist at varying levels of awareness; some, indeed, are entirely unconscious” (Yalom, 1980: 6).

Existential therapy takes a different view of the specific forces, motives and fears that interact within the individual. The existential view emphasises a different type of basic conflict: the existential conflict stems from the individual’s confrontation with the ‘givens’ of existence – those ultimate concerns that are inescapably a part of each individual existence in the world. Yalom deals with four ultimate existential concerns: death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980: 8).

### 2.12.10 Four ultimate concerns

The *first* concern is *death*. The existential conflict is the “tension between the awareness of the inevitability of death and the wish to continue to be” (Yalom, 1980: 8).



The *second* concern, *freedom*, is usually considered to be a positive factor in life. Existentially, freedom refers to the lack of external structure; each individual is responsible for his or her own individual worldview, life design, choices and actions. The existential tension is between the implication of nothingness or groundlessness when human beings wish for ground and structure (Yalom, 1980: 9).

The *third* concern is *isolation*; this is a fundamental, unbridgeable isolation from others. We enter the world alone and exit alone. The existential conflict is the tension between our “awareness of our absolute isolation and our wish for contact, for protection, and our wish to be part of a larger whole” (Yalom, 1980: 9).

The *fourth* concern is *meaninglessness*. If we are ultimately alone in a meaningless or indifferent universe, what is the point of living? Without a preordained design for each individual human being, “each of us must construct our own meaning in life” (Yalom, 1989: 10). The existential conflict is the result of another paradox; human beings who seek meaning are thrown into a universe with no meaning.

These four givens or four ultimate concerns, and the conscious and unconscious fears and motives produced by each are the characteristics of the existential psychodynamic approach. Yalom explains that the old formula of drive → anxiety → defence mechanism is replaced by awareness of ultimate concern → anxiety → defence mechanism. Both models assume that anxiety is the fuel of psychopathology; but where Freud’s progression begins with drive, the existential framework begins with awareness (Yalom, 1980: 10).

#### **2.12.11 Existential concerns**

The existential lexicon includes terms such as: being, choice, responsibility, freedom, death, isolation, mortality, absurdity, purpose in life, limitations and willing. These existential concerns have been discussed from the beginning of philosophical debate about the human condition and yet existentialism remains difficult to define. There is no cohesive ideological school of existential therapists.

Yalom’s position is that the only point of agreement is that an existential therapist must approach the client from a phenomenological standpoint. “He or she must enter the patient’s experiential world and listen to the phenomena of that world without the presuppositions that distort understanding” (Yalom, 1980: 17).

### **2.12.12 The coaching intervention and measuring phenomena**

My question is whether it will be possible to measure the effectiveness of the coaching intervention, if there is the possibility of a template for the coaching intervention. Yalom says that psychotherapy research has had very little impact upon the actual practice of therapy, and that he has doubts about the meaning of psychotherapy research. He said that outcome measures were taken from four different perspectives: those of the participant, the group leader, the participant's co-members and the participant's social network. Yalom says woe betide the researcher "who tries to measure important factors such as the ability to love or care for another, zest in life, purposefulness, generosity, exuberance, autonomy, spontaneity, humour, courage or engagement in life" (Yalom, 1980: 20).

He insists that the proper method "of understanding the inner world of another individual is the phenomenological one to go directly to the phenomena themselves, to encounter the other without standardised instruments and presuppositions" (Yalom, 1980: 25). This is in alignment with the first step of my phenomenological approach (i.e. to bracket assumptions).

This is interesting for me in my research. It raises the question of how can I possibly measure coaching interventions from a phenomenological point of view? It is not possible to provide a quantitative measure of qualitative phenomenological discoveries easily. The next question raised is what will be the 'ultimate concerns' that I should look at, i.e. death, freedom, isolation or meaninglessness, and are they relevant to coaching? This question has in fact been answered as the model has developed; those concerns have become freedom, meaning, choice and anxiety which surround the four action steps: reflection, responsibility, setting goals and change.

### **2.12.13 Paradigms and the four concerns**

What is relevant is the construct of paradigms. Yalom writes that paradigms "are self-created, wafer-thin barriers against the pain of uncertainty" (Yalom, 1980: 26). He talks about the importance of meaning, how important it is for the individual human being to construct meaning in their life. He says that the existential paradigm assumes that anxiety emanates from the individual's confrontation with those four ultimate concerns in existence: death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness.

The question for executive coaches is how do these four ultimate concerns affect coaching? How do these ultimate concerns affect the client in the workplace? Is it more to do with meaning and meaninglessness because people want to be doing a job that is meaningful? Human beings need purpose in their life.

What is closely related to the ‘organisation man’ or the workaholic executive is that individuals have always strived “for competent effective power and control ... getting ahead, achieving, accumulating material wealth, leaving works behind as imperishable monuments” and that this can become a way of life that effectively conceals the questions about the ultimate concerns (Yalom, 1980: 120).

#### **2.12.14 Being, being in becoming, doing**

Yalom mentions Florence Kluckholm who suggested three anthropological value orientations for the individual human: being, being in becoming, and doing (Yalom, 1980: 121). There is a lot of discussion in contemporary coaching circles about being and doing (and which comes first); but little about the second category.

*Being* emphasises the activity rather than the goal. *Being in becoming* shares with the being orientation and emphasises what the person is rather than what the person can accomplish; but it still emphasises the concept of development. The *doing* orientation emphasises accomplishments that are measurable by standards outside of the acting individual (Yalom, 1980: 121).

Yalom’s key paradox is whether we are personally special, or do we look to an ultimate rescuer? Both he defines as a kind of denial system. The belief in the personal rescuer is one denial system; the belief in personal specialness another. This is quite useful when helping a client come to terms with personal self-esteem and self-development.

“The belief that one’s life is controlled by external forces is associated with a sense of powerlessness, ineffectualness and ... can lead to low self-esteem;” (Yalom, 1980: 163). This is very relevant for clients who work within a family business or large family-dominated organisation. It is here that Yalom defines anxiety: “Anxiety is a signal that one perceives some threat to one’s continued existence (Yalom, 1980: 163).” Coaches consistently work with anxiety; albeit most clients tend to label it as ‘stress’ originating from external sources.

Yalom posits that death anxiety exists at the deepest levels of being, is heavily repressed and is rarely experienced in its full sense. He says anxiety is a guide to point the way to an authentic existence. He says life cannot be lived nor faced without anxiety. Anxiety is a guide as well as an enemy and can point the way to an authentic existence (Yalom, 1980: 188).

However, Yalom posits that the real agent of change is the therapeutic relationship. A framework for coaching (in Yalom’s view) may be a synthesis of: the business belief system,

the coach's model with its theoretical underpinnings, plus the development of the relationship (Yalom, 1980: 190).

#### **2.12.15 Death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness**

Yalom says that death is only one component of the human being's existential situation. Anxiety according to Yalom can be understood by understanding death (Yalom, 1980: 213). Freedom helps us to understand the assumption of responsibility, commitment to change, decision and action; isolation illuminates the role of relationship; and meaninglessness turns our attention to the principle of engagement.

The assumption of personal responsibility has a parallel with coaching; it is a major piece of my coaching model. The coach is ultimately trying to help the client take responsibility for their actions, become aware of their actions, and be aware of how their behaviour impacts on others.

#### **2.12.16 Making decisions**

In coaching the coach assumes that the client does not have a specific pathology and can therefore make decisions (this is however questionable in some situations with powerful leaders). Farber suggests that the important choices one makes in life (and Yalom says in therapy) are not consciously experienced as choices. It is only after the fact that you see them as a choice. So the subconscious component is experienced during or after the event. Will is inherent in any active change; the clinician's goal is change and one initiates change through wishing and choice (Yalom, 1980: 301). Once having decided, action follows. Therefore decision leads to action and hopefully to transformation.

Decisions are a lonely act, decisions not only force the individual to face the limitation of possibilities, but force "one to accept personal responsibility and existential isolation" (Yalom, 1980: 319).

#### **2.12.17 Existential isolation**

Yalom gives a definition of existential isolation: "Existential isolation refers to an unbridgeable gulf between one's self and any other being; the separation between the individual and the world, separation from the world" (Yalom, 1980: 357). In freedom there is existential isolation, and the paradox or the problem of relationship is the problem of isolation. "One must learn to relate to another without giving way to the desire to slip out of isolation by becoming part of the other, but one must also learn to relate to another without reducing the other to a tool" (Yalom, 1980: 359).

Yalom mentions the encounter group as a means of self-expression, but that they are simply monologues disguised as dialogues. If the coach is not careful, we can simply be listening to a monologue (with no room for awareness, introspection and reflection) on the part of the client. Very often in the first half hour I find that I am listening to a monologue, eventually diving into the labyrinth of the monologue with interventions such as clarifying questions. I would suggest that in coaching, the coach turns toward the client with the same “listening intensity” as is developed in psychotherapy.

I thought a really interesting question was in a relationship with somebody else: how many other people are there in a room? Yalom seems to suggest that all other people must be swept away before an authentic relationship between client and therapist can be developed in the room.

In coaching the system is essential to explore; in other words the client’s relationships with others in the workplace as well as personal relationships are investigated.

Yalom says that when he first started studying he learnt that the goal of psychotherapy is to bring the patient to the point where he can make a free choice. He says that is no longer true; but that the “encounter itself is healing” and that “a positive relationship between patient and therapist is positively related to therapy outcome” (Yalom, 1980: 401).

This is really the key concept I have encountered in reading both of Yalom’s books, i.e. it is the relationship that heals. And he says that the throw-ins in psychotherapy, the off-the-record contributions, help to build that relationship. He asks: “How does a therapeutic relationship heal?” He answers it firmly and finally by saying that, “There is much evidence for the argument that it is the real relationship that heals and that the real agent of change is the relationship” (Yalom, 1980: 404).

Coaching is however very different from psychotherapy. In psychotherapy the therapist uncovers the deepest strata of the individual’s mental experiences by asking questions such as (Yalom, 1980: 404):

- What is her world like at this moment?
- How is she experiencing the hour?
- How is she experiencing me?
- I ask her these very questions – I tell her that I have felt [...] for the last several minutes and she felt this way.

Yalom quotes Sartre by saying that engagement is the ultimate meaning, and that one must invent one’s own meaning. The difficulty is that one must invent one’s own meaning and then

permit oneself to fulfil that meaning. He talks about the different types of secular activities that give meaning which can be helpful to the executive coach to understand: (Yalom, 1980: 437):

- Altruism.
- Dedication to a cause.
- Creativity.
- The hedonistic solution, pleasure-seeking.
- Self-actualisation.
- Self-transcendence.
- Self-transcendence in the life cycle.

Maslow says we live in order to fulfil our potential. The Austrian psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, postulated an approach to the question of meaning based on the notion of self-transcendence; Frankl created Logo therapy which belongs neither to a psychoanalytical school, nor is it a form of psychiatry, religious study or academic psychology. It is more that “one is always conscious of something outside of themselves” (Yalom, 1980: 444).

Frankl said there are three categories of life meaning:

- What one accomplishes or gives to the world in terms of one’s creation.
- What one takes from the world in terms of encounters and experiences.
- One’s stand towards suffering, towards a state that one cannot change.

These three meaning systems are creative, experiential and attitudinal, and according to Frankl, “engagements in deep experience constitute meaning” (Yalom, 1980: 461).

Frankl stresses the uniqueness of each person’s meaning, and that engagement emerges as an answer to meaninglessness. Yalom says that engagement is the therapist’s most effective approach to meaninglessness; hence the importance of the intervention. A core concept from Yalom is that it is the relationship that helps the patient to move on. My interpretation would be that in engagement and intervention is the development of the relationship.

### **2.13 Systems thinking**

To understand the structure and mechanics of building a coaching model, I found it useful to study the basic concepts behind systems thinking. This is a simple explanation of how I have applied systems thinking to the construction of an organic model, and to understand the flexibility and circularity of the component parts working together. The following text is a review of systems theory; this includes the I-coach masters’ modules in 2002, Will

McWhinney's concept of paradigms and systems, and Ken Wilber's current thinking about the integral model.

## **2.14 Systems and models**

Models are systems. "A system is a concept constructed to solve a problem" (McWhinney, 1993: 13) and a coaching model is a *construct to create the space that defines where the coach and the client work*.

A system is about the relation of the parts to the whole. The family is the immediate system with which we are all familiar; a family business is another system; a social institute such as the Welfare Department is a system; the planets of the solar system another. A shared field of interests defines a 'family system'. "Boundaries between the sub-systems are marked by the relation between the people within a family (enmeshed, closed, and separated)" (McWhinney, 1993: ii-iii).

### **2.14.1 Human systems**

In recent years, 'systems thinking' has become an increasingly useful and popular approach to understand how organisations, businesses and groups of people behave, and how change comes about within those structures. 'Systems thinking' teaches us about the interconnectedness of people, professions, disciplines and other 'structures' within a team, organisation, business or family. Note that "the components and relations that make a particular unity comprise a system's structure" (McWhinney, 1993: 126).

Family system therapies developed to explain individual behaviour "arising from the behaviour of the family system or of the immediate family plus other relevant people and institutions" (McWhinney, 1993: 45). Systems theory, although originally developed to work with the nuclear family, was seen to be very relevant to organisations, teams, other work groups and communities, i.e. work, social, cultural and religious.

In coaching we are particularly concerned with 'human and organisational systems' (rather than mathematical or economic structures) and how they function and change. 'Human systems' take into account the various components of human nature: i.e. thinking, feelings, and attitudes, thinking patterns and the behaviour that impact on performance within the working system. This is what has particularly influenced the development of my model, which includes conscious/unconscious behaviour, limiting assumptions, thinking, feeling, sensing, intuiting, learning and performance (see model Appendix 4).

‘Systems thinking’ has its roots in engineering theories and cybernetics. Originally, it was concerned with self-regulating systems and the feedback loops that maintained the system’s stability. For behavioural psychologists and learning theorists in the 1970s feedback became a major tool, for example in Eric Berne’s transactional analysis (better known as TA), and in NLP as it was developed by Bandler and Grinder (McWhinney, 1993: 41).

‘Systems thinking’ follows a circular logic; it looks at the whole rather than component parts of the whole. This idea of circularity has had a strong influence on my model (which is encircled by existentialism, experiential learning, and the relationship).

## **2.15 Synergistic systems**

All systems are governed by the rule: “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Smuts, 1926). This implies that systems are synergistic. The interaction between the components in the system produces a result that exceeds the total results rendered by the sum of the individual components. It follows, that no system can be adequately understood if it is broken down into its component parts, and that no element in the system can be understood in isolation as those elements never function independently.

### **2.15.1 Organisation, wholeness, and interdependence**

The concept of organisation and wholeness are crucial to understanding how systems operate. All the components of a system have an organised, consistent relationship to one another. These components interact in a predictable, organised fashion with one another and are interdependent on one another.

This is the point in developing a coaching model; to understand the component parts and how they effect a change in the other components within the system. In my model, if a limiting assumption is replaced with an empowering assumption, it will impact on the reflection and awareness of the client, and ultimately on the behaviour and performance explicitly demonstrated in the workplace.

### **2.15.2 Subsystems and boundaries**

A complex model contains smaller subsystems that make up the larger ‘super-system’. Subsystems carry out particular functions in the larger system. Within each of these subsystems, different levels of power are exercised, different skills learned, and different responsibilities are assigned. It is also possible to belong to more than one subsystem at a time, which may imply a different set of relationships, responsibilities or levels of power. An



example in the business world is the tiered hierarchy of executives, managers, supervisors and employees.

### **2.15.3 Open/closed systems**

A closed system can be an organisation or community that is relatively closed off from its environment so that there is little interaction across the boundaries; a closed system tends to be closed to new ideas and can be authoritarian. An open system is characterised by a freer exchange within the environment (McWhinney, 1993: 110).

In creating my coaching model, I have tried to create an open system to allow for energy and information to flow over the boundaries, and to move in and out of the system. For example, the input/throughput/output micro-system fits into (but is influenced by) its sub-systems: i.e. the question frameworks and the overall theoretical underpinnings — quadernity, existentialism, phenomenology, psychotherapy research, analytical psychology, management science, emotional intelligence, the integral model and limiting paradigms.

### **2.15.4 The need for flexibility and movement**

Because a closed system is less flexible, it does not allow information to move across boundaries of the system. “A closed boundary allows no transit of energy, matter, or information – no form of energy – across the boundary that separates the system from its environment” (McWhinney, 1993: 17).

In the coaching conversation, there is a great deal of movement, and if the model is too rigid (or closed) it would not allow the coach flexibility in acting as a thinking partner to the client. As one of the key purposes of coaching is to help with the personal and professional growth and development of the client, an open model is required.

### **2.15.5 Circular causality**

Events in a system are seen to have a circular rather than a linear causality; this is affected by what is referred to as a feedback system, made up of a set of feedback loops. Instead of one-way causal or linear thinking, we build systems by developing a series of feedback loops that connect events with one another. In coaching, it is important to be able to think linearly, laterally, spontaneously and flexibly. The model needs to accommodate this versatility and system of feedback. For me, circularity helps to accommodate movement and feedback – for example, the ‘learning contract’ at the end of the session plays a key ‘feedback’ role, as well as at the beginning of any subsequent coaching conversation.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.15.6 Rules

Systems are governed by rules. The interaction of people in an organisation typically follow organised, established patterns, enabling each person to learn what is allowed or expected from him/her as well as others in the system. These rules are usually unspoken, unconscious and covert.

Organisations, businesses and other systems follow certain patterns of behaviour and the rules make up the governing principles of organisational, business and family life. Understanding the rules helps to understand the way in which people in these systems define their relationships with one another. It is not the individual's personal needs, motivation or personality that determines the interactive patterns between people, but the rules of the system. In this way, a highly motivated achiever may perform mediocre work or even fail in an organisation where the rule is: "You may not perform better than your peers".

When working with a client it is important to understand the system within which they are working, and to build that into the way you work with your client. In other words, your model needs to accommodate the movement into the larger system, either the family or the workplace. One of the reasons for creating a coaching model or a coaching system is to look at the interactions between the client and the outside system within which they live and work. Different to therapy, in coaching it is not just the relationship between coach and client which is addressed (as a microcosm of the larger system); it is the complexity of other relationships and systems within which their client operates if change is to take place.

### 2.16 Relationships

As we see when looking at the contemporary literature of psychotherapy and existential psychology, when dealing with human systems one is always and only ever concerned with the relationships between the people in the system. In a coaching conversation it is the immediate relationship between coach and client; in the larger system it is the others that the client relates to – the workplace or the family or social system. Relationships include conscious and overt relationships as well as the unconscious and covert relationships between members of the system. Generally relationships are described via the following terms in systems theory:

1. *Enmeshed*: too close, over involved, over independent.
2. *Disengaged*: too distant, not enough dependency.
3. *Alliances* are strategic, overt, known partnerships between two parties in a system (individuals, groups, departments, etc.). The purpose of forming an alliance is to achieve a common goal such as political parties who form alliances with one another in order to have more power in the system.

4. *Coalitions* are ‘not known’; they are covert but also strategic partnerships. They are often but not always secretive, closed and very powerful systems.
5. *Triangles* develop when one party is pulled into a relationship between two others as means of diverting information or energy. Two hostile departments in an organisation may involve a third to mediate the relationship between them (source: I-coach notes, Systems Module, 2002).

Within my client coaching conversations we talk a lot about building ‘alliances’ with colleagues in order for them to build personal and professional credibility in the workplace, and the necessity for survival of understanding what alliances, coalitions and triangles already exist that could be threatening to the client.

## **2.17 Paradigms and systems (Will McWhinney)**

In *Of Paradigms and Systems Theories* (1993), Will McWhinney works with “systemic thinking, modelling and theory building” (McWhinney, 1993: iv). McWhinney explains that human societies today create systems of beliefs which become worldviews or systems. The “myths, cosmologies, religions, and ideologies ... form the grand paradigm of a culture” (McWhinney, 1993: 1).

McWhinney posits that systems are embedded in the grand paradigms of their time. He details five systems theories with their structural assumptions, dominant causes, processes and metaphors: classic (ordering), dynamic (moving), communication (signalling), field (knowing) and evolutionary (becoming) (McWhinney, 1993: 28). Each of these still plays a part in our everyday experience.<sup>22</sup>

### **2.17.1 The evolutionary paradigm – becoming**

This is the unfinished paradigm of ‘self-organisation’. Considered to be the paradigm of adaptation and survival, this theory is related to the phenomena of persistence, change and innovation. The earliest traditions are the myths of origin; and this paradigm connects ancient myth and modern science, and questions arise about complexity vs. simplicity. The larger role of this paradigm is to define an evolutionary system theory and to define a theory of complexity. This is the basis, according to McWhinney, of a new social paradigm (McWhinney, 1993: 79-101).

People need symbols and coherent systems of belief to manage meaning and purpose in their lives. As Yalom describes it in existential terms, to manage meaninglessness is to determine: “what is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of my life? Why do we live? Why were we

put here? What do we live for? What shall we live by? If we must die, if nothing endures, then what sense does anything make?” (Yalom, 1980: 419).

“Each era is characterised by a paradigm that organises people’s thinking and action” (McWhinney, 1993: 3). Systems help us to understand the interrelationships that articulate a cultural worldview, and McWhinney suggests that it is time to choose “the elements of a new world-view”, or, as Thomas Kuhn (1970) expresses it, to participate in a “paradigm shift” (McWhinney, 1993: 2).

## **2.18 An integral vision**

My coaching model has developed with quadernity as its foundation, and is primarily about making connections, developing relationships and managing the limiting thinking that holds back the client. This essentially is what underpins my executive coaching philosophy and methodology.

Peter McNab’s *Towards an Integral Vision* (2005) analyses relationships, organisational communication and conversations through the lens of NLP (see endnote 7) integrated with Ken Wilber’s four quadrant model.<sup>23</sup>

The four-quadrant integral model integrates all previous models, working on the assumption that all theories really do connect to every other theory (McNab, 2005: 30). McNab rightly assumes that all models (whichever quadrant they fall within) are useful in helping others to change limiting thinking and behaviour; yet each is limited when it falls inside only one or two quadrants.

One description of NLP is that it is a way to model behavioural excellence in others. NLP deals with the inner workings of the mind and emotions which means it falls into one of the interior quadrants (internal quadrants in Wilber’s, Jung’s and Kolb’s models). McNab’s integration of NLP with the Graves/Wilber models is to create an integrated theory for business and organisations, and to integrate all previous models (McNab, 2005: 30). He talks about cause and effect, and that most people believe they are at ‘effect,’ i.e. they think they can only respond to what life throws at them. In existential terms, being at effect means they do not have control over their own life; life just happens to them. This according to McNab contributes to the ‘blame’ culture inside organisations (McNab, 2005: 32).

Whether an individual feels at ‘cause’ or ‘effect’ will determine their map, world-view or construct; it also determines the limitations they place on themselves. If we act as if we are at ‘cause’ we can “experience the world in a different way and can begin a new journey, one in which we know where we are going because we have a map ...; we have the flexibility to

respond to whatever happens to us” (McNab, 2005: 33). In NLP one of the first techniques is to create well-formed outcomes.<sup>24</sup>

Looking at a model of quadernity, our internal experience (thoughts, internal states and emotions) is on the left hand side; our external experience (external behaviours, what we say and do) is on the right hand side. In Figure 2.1 below, I have reorganised the four legs of McNab’s table accordingly with internal states on the left and external states on the right.

**Figure 2.1 McNab model**

	<i>Internal</i>	<i>External</i>
<i>Individual</i>	<p>3. <i>Flexibility</i> (internal, top left quadrant)</p> <p>Becoming aware that you could be thinking different thoughts, having different feelings and doing different things</p>	<p>4. <i>Take action</i> (external, top right quadrant)</p> <p>Taking massive action, doing something else</p>
<i>Social</i>	<p>2. <i>Sensory awareness</i> (internal, bottom left quadrant)</p> <p>Notice what is happening to you and to those around you</p>	<p>1. <i>Outcome</i> (external, bottom right quadrant)</p> <p>Knowing what you want</p>

Source: McNab (2005)

In NLP, we delete, generalise and distort data to make sense of the world. From these deletions, generalisations and distortions we create maps of the world and how it works. This map, or worldview, is how each individual perceives their own world. It includes the filters through which individuals process their experiences which determine their beliefs, values and meta-programmes. A map as metaphor was first popularised by Korzybski who said, “the map is not the territory”.<sup>25</sup> As a result of these maps we develop habitual behaviours and responses that are often outside of conscious awareness. The integral map is designed to explore these maps.

My coaching model is designed to help clients identify the limiting paradigms and assumptions that have created their map or worldview. These limiting paradigms can prevent individuals from achieving the changes they want in their lives, and reinforce the belief that they are not in control of their own emotions, behaviours, values and ultimately their lives. When under stress or duress, individuals fall back into old patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. It means that change, in terms of thinking, feeling and behaviour, is not so easily adapted and embedded.

In NLP there is primary and secondary gain; to achieve change it is important to understand the factors that prevent us from changing – these are often outside of conscious awareness. Secondary gain is what we continue to get by keeping our behaviour the same; what actually prevents us from changing (McNab, 2005: 53). For example, the secondary gain from not stopping smoking or not changing one's eating habits could be the comfort factor.

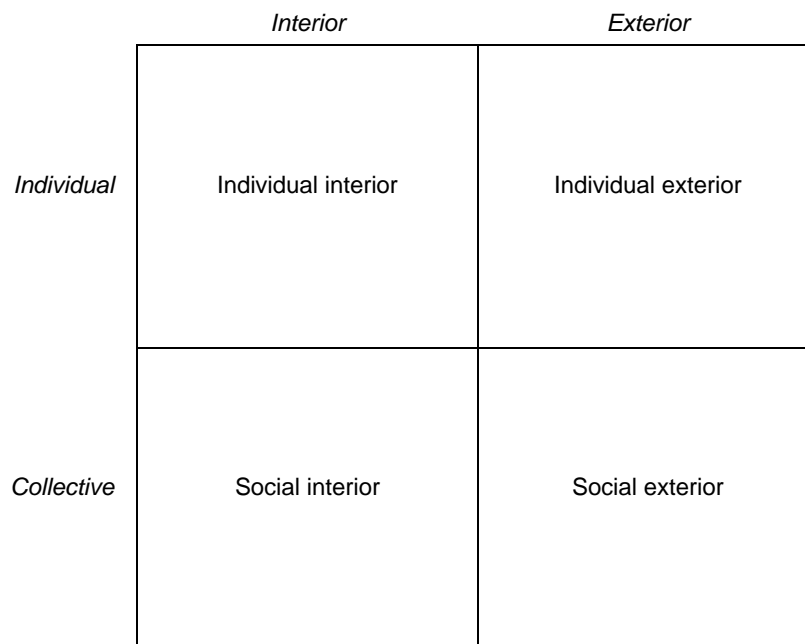
### **2.19 T.E.A. model (thoughts, emotions, actions)**

The three functions of this model (McNab, 2005: 61) are: *internal processing (thinking)*, *internal states (emotions)* and *external behaviours (actions)*. All three constantly influence each other, and if we change one the others change too, often at an unconscious level. *External behaviours* are our words and actions and these take place at the level of rapport. Rapport has four levels: non-verbal, tone of voice, the language that we use, and beliefs and values (McNab, 2005: 64). *Internal states* are our emotions and values; *internal processing* are our thoughts and beliefs. These are known as representational systems through which we filter all our information.

#### **2.19.1 Wilber's quadrants**

Returning to the metaphor of maps, Ken Wilber's quadrants are a useful coaching tool in the development of a coaching model. They integrate the interior and exterior aspects of any worldview, as well as the individual, social and collective aspects. Figure 2.2 illustrates how Wilber's model is divided into the four quadrants (McNab, 2005: 163-165).

Figure 2.2 Wilbur's four-quadrant model



Source: McNab (2005: 163-165)

The four quadrants represent the following aspects:

1. *Individual Interior (upper left)*:  
Represents what individuals think and feel and what we can see and touch.  
Intentional: an individual with intentions that derive from individual beliefs and values.
2. *Individual exterior (upper right)*:  
Includes our brain and body.  
Behavioural: an individual exhibits behaviours.
3. *Social interior (lower left)*:  
These behaviours exist within a culture that is the sum of one's society's beliefs and values.  
Cultural: world space.
4. *Social exterior (lower right)*:  
Include external manifestations of a society, i.e. buildings and societal structures.  
Social: a physical space and system of structures that reflect and affect the culture.

McNab explores the use of the four-quadrant model to examine emotional states, developing rapport, gathering information, setting outcomes, completing a task and checking for

congruency. He goes on to explore Clare Graves' model of spiral dynamics. Graves suggested that "the psychology of the mature human being is an unfolding, emergent, oscillating spiralling process marked by progressive subordination of older, lower-order behaviour systems to newer, higher-order systems as an individual's existential problems change. Each successive stage, wave, or level of existence is a state through which people pass on their way to other states of being" (McNab, 2005: 187). Graves was influenced by Abraham Maslow and his hierarchy of needs; like many other psychologists Maslow believed that we need to resolve certain issues before we can move on to the next issues that we need to resolve (from physiological needs, to safety needs, to social needs, to esteem needs to self-actualisation).

### **2.19.2 The integral conversation**

Useful to the coaching context may be what McNab calls the 'integral conversation'. This is a format put into the four quadrants that can be used when communicating with others; it looks at the conversation from both first person and second person perspective, and can be useful in creating a perspective on dialogue. The use of the four quadrants in Figure 2.3 could be useful to understand a two-way conversation between coach and client and may prove useful to help clients understand the reality of the other in a conversation. It is not dissimilar to third position thinking where the client thinks through a situation from three positions (first position/their own; second position/the other; third position/the coach).



**Figure 2.3 An integral conversation and the four quadrants*****An integral conversation:***

	<i>Interior</i>	<i>Exterior</i>
<i>Coach</i>	3. The coach's thoughts, beliefs, emotions and values 4. What the coach did not say 5. What might have happened if the coach had said those things?	1. The coach's side of the conversation
<i>Client</i>	6. The client's thoughts, beliefs, emotions and values 7. What the client did not say 8. What the client believed might have happened if s/he had said those things	2. The client's side of the conversation

***Adapting the four quadrants to a coaching conversation:***

	<i>Interior</i>	<i>Exterior</i>
<i>Coach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you now think, believe and feel about yourself, the client, the situation, and the relationship?</li> <li>• What is it that you want to get out of the coaching conversation?</li> <li>• Does this match with your values and beliefs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you going to say and do to ensure that you achieve your outcome, including the content, your tone of voice, posture, gestures, and facial expression?</li> <li>• How does this match with the client's outcome?</li> </ul>
<i>Client</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you know what the coach wants to achieve during your coaching conversation?</li> <li>• Does this match your own outcome?</li> <li>• Where the two do not match, have you considered what needs to happen?</li> <li>• Are you happy with any necessary compromises?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you organised the physical environment in such a way that it will support both of you in your outcomes?</li> </ul>

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Source: Adapted from McNab (2005)

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## **2.20 Using experience for learning (Boud)**

“Construction of experience is never ending” (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 12) because experience of life is never ending.

In Boud, Cohen and Walker’s *Using Experience for Learning* (1996) the writers share their research in using experience for learning and ask: how do we learn from experience; how does experience impact on individual and group learning; what is the role of personal experience in learning; and do emotions have a vital role to play in intellectual learning?

When I began my research project I thought I would search for the perfect template of coaching interventions, and very soon began to realise that was not realistic: that due to the unique experiences of life on the part of all clients, there would be no such thing as the perfect template. In other words, all questions need to be tailored to the client.

In studying existential philosophy, it has been confirmed to me that there are certain themes that are universal; but the patterns of questions are formulated based on individual experience and individual learning styles. Boud, Cohen and Walker’s research is in alignment with this hypothesis.

Their book is divided into three parts: part one defines and explores experiential learning; part two discusses barriers to learning and barriers to reflection on experience; part three explores T-groups and working with groups. Chapter 10, which has had a profound affect on my thinking, examines team learning. Essentially the three editors are struggling to make sense of learning from experience.

“The world of learning is rapidly changing” and “what is missing is recognition of the role and relevance of learning from experience no matter where it occurs” (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 1). The authors explain that they have come to recognise that ideas are not separate from experience, and that learning requires interaction, either directly or symbolically, with elements outside the learner (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 2).

### **2.20.1 Intention and process**

What is important in experience-based learning is to understand *exactly* how we learn from our experience. How can we best help others to learn from their experience? How does context and purpose influence learning? In order to draw attention to the much wider domain of learning

from experience, the authors decided that it was more useful to base the book on the actual experience of all the contributors to the book.

### **2.20.2 Our own learning**

The contributors talked at length about learning until the patterns in their thinking emerged. In meeting to discuss the book, the contributors shared their learning histories which revealed how important the past is to an individual's present learning; they also reflected on how they may have been shaped by personal experience (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 4). The central focus of the book, and what was difficult for the contributors, was the focus on the importance of the *personal* in how people interpret their own experience.

The authors believe that processing (and reflecting on) personal experience is clearly a major factor in developing higher-level learning. This has a major impact on coaching because one of the skills the coach works on in-depth is reflection. This highlights the importance of *self-reflection* in learning from experience.

“We have been mindful of the difficulty in writing about ‘experience’” (Boud and Walker, 1996: 4). The authors consider the word ‘experience’ as a verb, and it suggests that experience is either a particular instance or a process of observing, undergoing or encountering (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 5). This advocates that experience is not simply an event which happens, it is an event with meaning, or it could be said that experience is a meaningful *encounter*.

However, because experience is so “multifaceted, multi-layered and so inextricably connected with our experiences” ... “we must take account of, and build on, the unique perceptions and experiences of those involved, for without this we are dealing with only the most superficial aspects of learning” (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 7).

## **2.21 Learning from experience**

### **2.21.1 Proposition 1 – Experience is the foundation of and stimulus for learning**

It is meaningless to talk about learning in isolation from experience. Learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged, at least at some level, and every experience is potentially an opportunity for learning (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 8).

In other words, learning always relates, in one way or another, to what has gone before – which means that the effect of all experience influences all learning; it implies a seeking of new meanings from old experience.

The writers say that we do not simply see a new situation afresh, but we see it in terms of how we relate to it and how it resonates with what past experience has made us. “To teach is to learn twice, to experience a double delight” (Lee Andresen in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 9).

Working with our experience is one of the keys to learning. “Experience has to be arrested, examined, analysed, considered and negated to shift to knowledge” (Boud, Cohen and Walker (1996: 157-167).<sup>26</sup>

This is not dissimilar to phenomenology where the linking of new experiences with those of the past can provide new meanings. In reflecting on experience, reflection plays the role of drawing meaning from experience; we literally enter “into a dialogue with our experience that we can turn experiential knowledge into propositional knowledge (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 10).

Experiential learning is viewed as an active process in which the learner needs to work with the experience again and again to appreciate the meanings associated with it. This is similar to phenomenology where you probe the essence of the data again and again to understand the significance of the data or experience.

### **2.21.2 Proposition 2: Learners actively construct their experience**

This means that the learner attaches their own meaning to events, and reaches commonly accepted interpretations of the world. In phenomenological terms, experience is subject to interpretation. But in existential phenomenological terms we do not interpret, we simply bracket our assumptions and describe the phenomena. In experiential learning, experience is subject to interpretation. This is because (in existential terms as well), the meaning of experience is not a given, it is subject to interpretation.

As in existential phenomenology, it is interesting that ‘relationship’ comes up as an important factor in learning from experience. According to Boud, Cohen and Walker, experience is created in the ‘transaction’ between the learner and the environment in which he or she operates – it is relational. How learners construct their experience is what Boud, Cohen and Walker term the learner’s personal foundation of experience (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 11). More is often lost than gained by ignoring the uniqueness of each person’s history and ways of experiencing the world.

### **2.21.3 Proposition 3: Learning is a holistic process**

The authors make a common division between cognitive, affective and conative learning. The cognitive is concerned with thinking; the affective is concerned with values and feelings; the conative, or psychomotor, is concerned with action and doing. Learning is cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Learning involves the feeling and emotions (affective), the intellectual and cerebral (cognitive) and action (conative).<sup>27</sup>

### **2.21.4 Proposition 4: Learning is socially and culturally constructed**

Learning does not occur in isolation from our social and cultural norms and values. While learners construct their own experience, they do so in the context of a particular social setting and range of cultural values. In other words, learners do not exist independently of their environment. Other considerations are language, social class, gender, ethnic background and our own learning from an early age.

The authors agree that the most powerful influence from the social and cultural context on our learning occurs through language. Note that language is constantly evolving and changing in every context. Another factor is emotion. One of the contributors, John Mulligan, focuses on the emotional aspects of learning. He identifies seven categories of internal processes which include reasoning, feeling, imagining and intuiting.<sup>28</sup>

### **2.21.5 Proposition 5: Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs**

Similar to Kline's (2005) thinking environment, denial of emotions leads to a denial of learning. There are two key sources of influence in learning: past experience and the role of others in the present that support our learning. And different kinds of learning occur depending on whether the context is perceived as positive or negative. "The way in which we interpret experience is intimately connected with how we view ourselves" (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 15-16). This determines how we develop confidence and self-esteem which are necessary to learn from experience.

The authors do not pretend to cover the vast territory of learning from experience, and they are aware of the limitations of conceptualising learning from experience. Similarly, when looking at contemporary literature in question frameworks, models and the coaching literature, I cannot pretend to cover the entire array of possibilities.

## 2.22 Introduction to experiential learning

The basic approach in my research project is that the coaching intervention helps to build the rapport and the relationship between client and coach – this leads naturally to the success of the coaching conversation. The conclusion of *Using Experience for Learning* is that experience is the foundation and the source of learning, and how learning is essentially linked to personal experience.

The theories and learnings from this book had quite an impact on my thinking and development of my coaching model. My comments on chapters 1 to 11 are written up and available if required; they relate specifically to experiential learning and were too lengthy to include in this chapter. Below is a brief summary of my analysis of this book on experiential learning.

Denis Postle in his chapter *Putting the Heart Back Into Learning* (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 22-45) explores the concept of ‘emotional competence’: this is the capability of addressing emotion and feeling that actively supports facilitators’ and learners’ ways of learning from experience (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 19). This is an early reference to emotional quotient and emotional competence commercially popularised by Daniel Goleman (1996). Postle suggests seven specific criteria, or internal processes, to assess the presence of emotional competence: reasoning, feeling, sensing, intuiting, remembering, imagining and willing.

Stephen Brookfield in Chapter 1 (*Through the Lens of Learning: How the Visceral Experience of Learning Reframes Teaching*) posits that teachers should regularly experience what it feels like to learn something unfamiliar and difficult; this is the best way to help teachers empathise with the emotions and feelings of their own learners.

Prior to Daniel Goleman and Candice Pert popularising EQ (emotional quotient), previous research in the realm of adult and experiential learning explored putting the heart back into learning, emphasising the affective mode of learning – i.e. the capacity to learn at an emotional level. It is an area where executive coaches work, particularly in the western world where ‘emotion’ is considered to be negative and an inhibitor of clear, rational thinking. Mary Beth O’Neill (2000) is a contemporary example of effectively linking people processes to business outcomes.

This is why it is so important within the executive coaching contract to develop a balance between EQ, IQ and SQ as the western mindset is overly pragmatic about decision-making and logical ‘left-brain thinking’.<sup>29</sup> The development of emotional intelligence cannot be under-

estimated in the executive coaching environment and for this reason was a key component in developing my coaching model.

### **2.23    *Activating internal processes in experiential learning***

John Mulligan in his chapter, *Activating Internal Processes in Experiential Learning*, explains his model of internal process or skills that can be used to improve the way people learn from experience. The model offers a way of categorising internal actions; and the rationale for the model is that different kinds of learning tasks require different types and sequences of learning processes (Mulligan in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 46-49). The idea is that if learners can understand the different processes for learning, they will be able to intentionally use them – for learning, teaching and to improve intelligence.

The seven processes are: *reasoning, feeling, sensing, intuiting, remembering, imagining and willing*. The model highlights their inter-relatedness. Because it is assumed that reason requires a rational, objective framework and feeling requires a subjective, emotion-based response – they are posited as polar opposites. Sensing and intuiting are also at opposite poles in terms of their functions. Imagining and remembering depend on all four poles (sensing, intuiting, reasoning and feeling) to function effectively, but are placed as opposites to reflect their “temporal orientation towards what has been and what has to come into being” (Mulligan in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 46). Willing is the function at the centre of the model and is necessary to manage the functioning of the other six towards specific learning tasks.

Mulligan maps his learning processes and uses his model of seven internal processes to describe his learning journey and struggles in life between inner and outer worlds. This is a useful model for the executive coach.

### **2.24    *On becoming a maker of teachers***

In revisiting life-experience and being part of all one has met, Andresen asks if teachers have forgotten what it was like to be ignorant and are now unable to revisit that experience (Andresen in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 59). He suggests that when teaching the teacher must journey back to that uncomfortable place of ignorance.

One way to begin is to ask students to write their autobiographical reflections first on being a learner, second on being a teacher. Andresen adopts an autobiographical style and his writing is influenced by his personal reflections on life-experiences.

## **2.25 Reflection and barriers to learning from experience**

Reflection is the central focus in this section: how to approach it, foster it and work with what emerges from reflection. It is a major component of Kolb's learning cycle and of my coaching model.

### **2.25.1 Barriers to learning from experience and phenomenology**

With a focus on the client, practitioners need to understand what the barriers are to learning from experience. Angela Brew (in Boud and Walker, 1996) posits that new learning can help us unlearn what flowed from past experiences and help us make sense of the phenomena of experience. What we learn from experience does not simply add to information, but transforms our way of experiencing.

How does experience transform our perception? What is the relationship between learning, experience and reflection? As coaches do we provide enough time for reflective activity? Kolb forms a major part of my coaching model because reflection on experience leads to awareness and an ability to identify what is working, what is not working, and what needs to change.

### **2.25.2 Discovering barriers to learning**

The facilitation of learning is essentially about helping learners to identify, manage and overturn their barriers to learning. This means empowering the learner by helping them to perceive a learning barrier as something that can be changed rather than being a personal deficiency. I believe that if experiential learning is about helping learners to understand their barriers to learning, coaching is helping the client to identify and replace the limiting assumptions that are barriers to learning.

### **2.25.3 Working with barriers – critical reflection**

Most barriers stem from the perception of the learner. Boud and Walker list four useful steps to help transform or diminish the impact of barriers to learning:

1. First *acknowledge* that they exist.
2. Second *clarify* and name our own reflection and experience.
3. Third *reflect* critically.
4. Fourth, *confront* and *transform* these barriers.

Boud and Walker in their chapter, *Barriers to Reflection on Experience* investigated sources of the critical reflection movement, and found that they were concerned with the assumptions and presuppositions which limited the experiences of people and constrained their freedom. I



would add here, that assumptions and presuppositions impact an individual's freedom to choose - in an existential sense.

Whatever else we do as reflective experiential learners, it is important to consider the whole of experience as relevant and not be too surprised when critically reflecting that we make connections which previously we were unable to see.

## **2.26 Unlearning through experience**

In Chapter 6 of Boud, Cohen and Walker's *Using Experience for Learning* (1996), Angela Brew explores three types of knowledge: *propositional*, *practical* and *experiential*. Brew raises the question about learning from experience. Is it cumulative, and does wisdom come from experience? She confesses that she has an entire repertoire of mechanisms to prevent her from finding out what she doesn't want to know. As she explains, traditional academic inquiry de-emphasises the role and value of human subjective experience (Brew in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 89).

### **2.26.1 Wisdom is not an accumulation of experience**

Brew suggests that wisdom may come through experience, but it does not come through an accumulation of experience. Unlearning is about being prepared to throw out what one has learnt and beginning afresh. The process of learning, paradoxically, can be the process of unlearning.

## **2.27 Experiential learning at a distance**

In this chapter, *Experiential Learning at a Distance*, Mary Thorpe comments that distance education might not be a sympathetic context for experiential learning because the learner does not develop a critical, reflective capacity. It is through reflection, as identified by many researchers, that both concrete experience and abstract theory are transformed into knowledge, which become the learner's own, and which they can use in their own terms (Thorpe in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 99, *cf.* Kolb, 1984; Boud, *et al.*, 1985). Thorpe explains that distance learning is flawed because it undermines the development of reflection by the learner (Thorpe in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 99).

Thorpe's final conclusion is that distance education is not anti-experiential learning in any intrinsic sense, and does offer potential for a rich learning experience through the integration of conceptual thinking with experience from a particular milieu (Thorpe in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 112).

## **2.28 Learning from experience in mathematics**

This is an interesting chapter because John Mason uses the learning and teaching of mathematics as a metaphor for learning itself. Schon (1983) refers to the reflective practitioner, the individual who reflects upon or tries to make sense of his or her experience. Mason comments that in order to learn intentionally from experience, some action is necessary. The extra action needed amounts to what Mason (1996) calls “the discipline of noticing” (Mason in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 113).

Intentional learning through experience requires action, not passivity. According to Mason, experiential learning is not simply a “confrontation with randomly-stored memories” (Mason in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 116). This intentional action is more a form of storytelling – according to Mason it takes story-telling, or story-weaving, to reflectively and intentionally reconstruct experience.

## **2.29 Questions about group learning**

In the third section of *Using Experience for Learning* (1996) the contributors pose questions about group learning. How do groups learn, as a group? How can individual learners be helped in their learning within a group context? How do society and culture affect experience and learning? What is the relationship between meaning and experience, between language and experience, between discourse and experience?

Miller integrates her concerns as a sociologist, adult educator and feminist; Kasl, Dechant and Marsick propose a model of group learning; Criticos reflects on the social and political conditions in South Africa and shows how apartheid affected the experience and learning of all members of its society; Usher focuses on our use of language and reminds us that meaning is relational and contextual (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996).

*On reflection my question is this: is it useful for the coach to suggest to the client that the coaching session is not just a thinking environment but that it is also a learning environment? The coach first needs to develop values such as trust and respect in the relationship. However, in the interpersonal interaction that takes place between the coach and client, the coach could move through the phases of learning.*

## **2.30 Experiential learning and social transformation**

In Chapter 11, “Experiential learning and social transformation for a post-apartheid learning future”, Costas Criticos (1996) writes about the challenges facing South Africa as a result of

the apartheid years. He rightly says that two of the most important South African institutions that challenged the apartheid government and created space for dialogue were the churches and the universities. His description of the apartheid oppression is as a pathology of racist oppression; this pathology was created by the tension “between contradictory experiences and contradictory explanations of society” (Criticos in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 157).

He explains that ‘learning’ can live inside the conversations and dialogues that are produced by these tensions. Criticos’ chapter explores the liberating nature of experiential learning in South Africa. As I live and work in South Africa this was of particular interest as I contrast the high-flying executive world with the deprived, under-educated communities.

### **2.30.1 Learning from experience: does it make a difference?**

Robin Usher, in Chapter 12, “Experiential learning or learning from experience: does it make a difference?”, asks an incisive question, “Is there a difference between learning from experience and experiential learning?” (Usher in Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1996: 169).

What is not stated here is the influence of language on experience, and the influence of discourse on experiential learning. In other words, learning from experience means a linguistic interpretation, searching for meaning and reconstructing reality.

In the context of the coaching conversation, when the client talks about their experience, they are creating a story. Storytelling constructs meaning in a different way from merely describing an experience. There is power in language and in content, and the significance comes from the interpretation and structure of the story.

*The question is if clients do not see themselves as learners or as learning from experience, or even see their stories as reconstructions of reality – how can we use the coaching conversation, and especially coaching interventions, to help clients to learn, change and achieve their outcomes? Learning and particularly learning from experience therefore seems to be a major component of the coaching conversation.*

### **2.31 In conclusion**

*Using Experience in Learning* (1996) had a profound effect on my thinking about the coaching conversation, and the space it opens up for clients to learn from their own personal experience.

I realise, as I have read and researched, that each individual coaching conversation has three basic phases (input, throughput, output); and coaching interventions occur in combination with and are integrated into these phases. What I would like to test in the future are the four phases of team experience learning (contained, collected, constructed and continuous learning) and how they affect the coaching conversation.

Previously I have worked within the structure of a coaching model, with question frameworks as part of that model. My new thinking is that the coaching model must reflect the process or phases of experiential learning (i.e. reflection and awareness, responsibility assumption, setting goals and taking action, personal growth and change).

### **2.32 Concluding Part II**

*Parts I and II have been an exploration of the underlying philosophies of experiential learning, existential phenomenology, existential psychotherapy, and other influences on my coaching model such as linguistics, cognitive and behavioural psychology, systems thinking, paradigmatic plurality and cultural competence. Part III is an exploration of the contemporary coaching question frameworks which have influenced this project.*

## Chapter 2

**Terms of Reference and Literature Review*****Part III: Question Frameworks*****2.33 Part III - Question frameworks**

Part III analyses the contemporary coaching literature for examples of the coaching intervention, in particular question frameworks which have impacted the research project and the development of an executive coaching model for the coaching conversation.

The following exposition reveals the influence of contemporary psychotherapy literature and contemporary coaching frameworks on my research. Research into contemporary coaching is new and limited, particularly in the arena of question frameworks. Therefore a considerable part of my research into coaching interventions was within the field of psychotherapy literature which is highly researched. There is a direct relationship between psychological methods and coaching practice, and there is a wealth of skills from the psychotherapy literature which are useful to the executive coach.

The relationship between client and therapist has some parallels with that of the coach/client relationship, only in the sense that both practitioners use similar skills. However, a primary difference is the depth that the therapist will probe, and the training and clinical practice the therapist has experienced; the coach advocates some depth but with more action-oriented outcomes.

My primary influences in contemporary psychotherapy literature are Irvin Yalom's *The Gift of Therapy* (2001) and *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980); Bruce Peltier's *The Psychology of Executive Coaching*; Alison and Freddie Strasser's *Existential Time-Limited Therapy, the wheel of existence* (2002); and from the contemporary coaching literature: Mary Beth O'Neill's *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart* (2000); Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl's *Co-Active Coaching*, (1998); Robert Hargrove's *Masterful Coaching* (2003); John Whitmore's *Coaching for Performance* (2002); Nancy Kline's *Time to Think* (2005).

### 2.34 **Developing a coaching framework**

Among the developments of my research and outcomes of my reading of contemporary literature are (I) a model for the coaching intervention; (II) a code book of ‘coaching intervention’ themes from the four levels of enquiry into the six client coaching transcripts; and (III) a deeper understanding of the difference in the relationship in a coaching context *vs.* a psychotherapy context; and (IV) a greater understanding of how to build a safe thinking environment for the client in the coaching context. See Chapters 4, 5 and 6 for discussions of my project activity, project findings and project conclusions.

### 2.35 **An existential and interpersonal approach (Yalom)**

Through a sustained study of Irvin Yalom’s *Gift of Therapy* (2001), I clarified my approach to coaching, from both an ‘*interpersonal*’ and ‘*existential*’ perspective. This research process has begun to investigate the legitimacy of that claim in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. I have found a distinct chord of resonance in the works of Alison and Freddie Strasser’s *Existential Time-Limited Therapy, the wheel of existence* (1997/2002); Ernesto Spinelli’s *The Interpreted World, an Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology* (1989); Irvin Yalom’s *Gift of Therapy* (2001) and *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980); and Emmy van Deurzen’s *Existential Counselling and Psychotherapy in Practice* (2002).

Where Yalom’s existential approach is the result of helping clients to deal with the harsh ‘givens’ of existence (death, meaninglessness, isolation and freedom), my approach may be more influenced to deal with values, ethics, meaning of life, life’s purpose, choice, will, action, responsibility, decision, building alliances, self-creation and self-actualisation. Yalom says these are serious existential questions – “life purpose, values, ethics, responsibility, freedom, death, community, connectedness” (Yalom, 2001: 221). In fact he suggests that freedom is made up of: self-creation, choice, will and action (Yalom, 2001: 137) and that responsibility is a derivative of freedom encompassing three other derivatives: willing, wishing and deciding (Yalom, 2001: 138).

Yalom defines existential psychotherapy as “*a dynamic therapeutic approach that focuses on concerns rooted in existence*” (2001: xvi). Yalom defines ‘dynamic’ in its technical sense, i.e. rooted in Freud’s model of mental functioning, assuming that “*forces in conflict within the individual generate the individual’s thought, emotion, and behaviour*” (Yalom, 2001: xvi). The importance of this definition is that “*these conflicting forces exist at varying levels of awareness; indeed some are entirely unconscious*” (Yalom, 2001: xvi).

Hence Yalom defines existential psychotherapy as a dynamic therapy, assuming that unconscious forces influence conscious functioning (Yalom, 2001: xvi) but that also those inner conflicts are not just from the individual's struggle with suppressed instinctual strivings or from traumatic memories, but are also "*from our confrontation with the "givens" of existence*" (Yalom, 2001: xvii). As mentioned earlier, these "givens" or "ultimate concerns" are the "deep structures of experience"; the four most closely aligned to psychotherapy are: death, isolation, meaning in life, and freedom (Yalom, 2001: xvii). These four issues arise in the coaching context and although not explored as deeply as in a therapeutic context, it is important for the coach to be sensitive to them.

### **2.36 The Importance of relationship**

Yalom discusses the two most important aspects of therapeutic discourse: process and content. To use Yalom's definitions, 'content' are the words spoken and issues addressed within the practitioner/client session; 'process' is of a wider dimension, i.e. the "interpersonal relationship" between client and practitioner (Yalom, 2001: xvii). Therefore process refers to the impact of the interactions, verbal and non-verbal behaviour, on the relationship between client and therapist (Yalom, 2001: xviii). In Yalom's words, "therapy should not be theory-driven but relationship-driven" (Yalom, 2001: xviii) — a formulation that describes the foundation in my coaching model for the importance of the relationship — because it is to do with the 'impact of the interaction' or the power of the dynamic between coach and client in the coaching conversation.

The values that Yalom suggests should underlie the therapist's work with clients are: honesty, inclusiveness, generosity of spirit, engagement, openness, egalitarianism; and the goal should be that of facilitating personal growth and character change (Yalom, 2001).

For the coach, the values could be the same, but the goals may be different, and fitting with my model the coach's goal would be '*to facilitate personal and professional growth, by identifying and replacing limiting assumptions or limiting paradigms with empowering assumptions which help the client to achieve their desired outcomes*'. Where Yalom in a therapy situation advocates removing obstacles blocking his patient's path (Yalom, 2001: 1), my coaching model and client work advocates identifying and replacing limiting paradigms, assumptions and worldviews with more empowering ones to help the client achieve his/her goals.

Yalom writes about the darker side of life (disillusionment, aging, illness, isolation, loss, meaninglessness, painful choices, and death). The coach often does not know how to deal with these issues when they arise in a coaching context, and should understand when the client

needs to simply discuss them openly and without guilt; or when the client needs to be referred for therapy. This should be a key part of a coach's training.

The structure of the coaching intervention needs to be framed by the ability to listen, and to actively intervene only when needed. It is important that the coach/client relationship is based on equality; this is different to the therapist/client relationship which is often not considered to be an equal relationship. In a coaching relationship, one is not superior to the other – both are travellers on the client's journey. For this reason, the inner circle on my coaching model (implying input, throughput, and output) is the relationship. A 'safe thinking environment' is built through the development of the relationship, and the relationship is what can help with the onset of change.

### **2.36.1 Positive regard and appreciation**

A vital aspect of the coaching intervention is Yalom's axiom to be supportive of the client (Yalom, 2001: 13), i.e. the value of positive support of coach to client. Not only does it build trust in the relationship, it may be one of the few places where the client is unconditionally supported in their personal and professional life.

This is aligned with the 'appreciation' component of Nancy Kline's thinking partnership in her six stage coaching model. This can include positive comments about a particular action or behaviour, or a quality the coach has noticed recently. Giving support means a willingness on the part of the coach to give, but it also models the giving of support.

### **2.36.2 Empathy**

The three essential characteristics identified by Carl Rogers for effective therapy were: unconditional positive regard, genuineness and accurate empathy (Yalom, 2001: 18). Yalom posits the importance of accurate empathy in the domain of the 'here-and-now' (Yalom, 2001: 19) and the importance of teaching empathy to clients.

### **2.36.3 Being willing to be influenced by the client**

I see this as a very important aspect of coaching. It is important that coach and client change as the relationship grows. "I urge you to let your patients matter to you, to let them enter your mind, influence you, change you – and not to conceal this from them (Yalom, 2001: 26-27).

### **2.36.4 Acknowledgement of errors**

In coaching, as in therapy, the practitioner is not always right. The practitioner is human and makes mistakes; but it is crucial to admit those mistakes. This keeps the trust and safety of the



relationship. It adds to the authenticity of the practitioner within the relationship, and of course models behaviour (Yalom, 2001: 32).

### **2.36.5 Be careful of rigidity – build flexibility into your model**

Yalom talks of the importance of spontaneity, and of being aware of using a package or formulaic approach to the client (Yalom, 2001: 34). In the same way, the coach can be trying to adhere so hard to a ‘coaching model’ that it gets in the way of the relationship with the client, and the personal and professional growth of the client.

Yalom’s comment is that “every course of therapy consists of small and large spontaneously generated responses or techniques that are impossible to program in advance” (Yalom, 2001: 35). In other words, coaches should learn to trust their own intuition, and to be spontaneous and flexible with the client. As Yalom says, all that happens is “grist for the mill” (Yalom, 2001: 36).

### **2.36.6 Be coached yourself**

The importance of the coach being coached or in supervision cannot be over-emphasised. While a fundamental underpinning of therapy since its inception, it is not yet a ‘given’ in the coaching industry worldwide. The importance of this is to ensure the coach understands what the client goes through, and to work on his/her own ‘issues’ so they do not become entangled with those of the clients.

As Yalom says, human problems are “largely relational” and an individual’s interpersonal problems will ultimately manifest themselves in the here-and-now of a therapy encounter (Yalom, 2001: 48). The same is true of the coaching environment; the client’s interpersonal issues will soon emerge in the relationship between coach and client.

## **2.37 The coaching intervention**

Historically, the models of therapy have shifted over the years. The first model of the therapist-patient relationship was the ‘blank screen’ where the therapist stayed neutral hoping the patient would project onto this “blank screen major transference distortions” (Yalom, 2001: 75). The second model was the therapist as archaeologist digging through the past to understand “the original trauma” (Yalom, 2001: 75). Although Freud often entered into the personal lives of his patients, Carl Rogers in his early years advocated non-directive therapy with minimal direction to the client; however, “he soon abandoned this style for a more humanistic, interactive style” (Yalom, 2001: 76).

In coaching, the coach will adapt his or her style according to their model, but if the major presupposition of the coaching interaction is one of equality, it would be difficult to imagine a coach adopting the road of ‘minimal direction’ or interaction. More important would be the development of the relationship through the client/coach interactions.

Therefore, I think it important to share facets of oneself as they relate to the situation at hand, or are related to the topic of conversation. For example, I have often shared with clients if I am under an undue amount of stress. Also, there are sometimes moments to shout about; I shared my husband’s success recently in publishing his latest book and several clients wanted to come to the book launch, as well as to the opening night of one of his plays. It is not necessary to dwell on your own personal issues, positive or negative; just to comment. Yalom talks about the “genuine encounter”: “how can one have a genuine encounter with another person while remaining so opaque” (Yalom, 2001: 92).

Harry Stack Sullivan defined psychotherapy as “a discussion of personal issues between two people, one of them more anxious than the other” (Yalom, 2001: 108). Although the coach is not dealing with the neuroses of their clients, there is a great deal of anxiety that arises in the professional working life of clients that needs to be addressed. In therapy, the therapist gives feedback on the relationship as it occurs; whereas in coaching the feedback is on relationships out in the workplace which have the most focus.

### **2.37.1 Meaning and meaninglessness**

We as humans are “meaning-seeking creatures” and we have been “thrown into a world devoid of intrinsic meaning” (Yalom, 2001: 133). It is not uncommon in the coaching conversation, for a client to ask the coach to help him/her figure out the ‘meaning of their life’. Yalom suggests approaching the meaning of life ‘obliquely’ and that it is “engagement that counts” (Yalom, 2001: 136).

In therapy the essential first step is for individuals to recognise their role in creating their own life predicament; it is similar in the coaching context. It is simply that the client has the power to change their situation (Yalom, 2001: 141). One of the roles of the coach is to help the client identify where they have control, and where they don’t. Often the client’s stress is due to focusing on the behaviour of others, over which they have little if any control. Over their own behaviour they do have control.

### **2.38    *The psychology of coaching (Peltier)***

Bruce Peltier defines the purpose of his book *Psychology for Executive Coaches* (2001) as one of translating psychotherapy theory for executive coaches because “most coaching books don’t effectively establish a direct relationship between psychological methods and coaching practice” (Peltier, 2001: xiii). It is useful to look at the difference between executive coaching and psychology before delving into Peltier’s suggested question or coaching intervention frameworks.

In chapter 1 Peltier describes the application of psychological testing principles and methods, i.e. assessment; in chapters 2 to 9 he describes specific psychotherapy theories. They are Freud’s psychodynamic view; behavioural concepts; the person-centred approach (i.e. Carl Rogers’ approach); cognitive psychology and cognitive therapy (how the mind works); family therapy and systems thinking (how that affects the organisation); hypnotic communication; social psychology in coaching; the existential choice; lessons from athletic coaches; coaching women in business; the differences between management and leadership; ethics in coaching; and making the transition from therapist to coach.

I found this book practical and enlightening. Peltier discusses two forms of coaching: executive and management. Executive coaching is to provide “one-on-one services to top level leaders in an organisation on the principle that positive changes can be leveraged to filter down and enhance the entire organisation” (Peltier, 2001: xv). Many people are promoted into leadership positions based on excellence in other areas, but they were never intended for a leadership position and are not prepared for it; hence coaching comes to the forefront.

The question this book raises is what does psychology have to do with executive coaching? Peltier defines coaching in many ways, but the simplest definition is that “coaching works best when it is seen as an activity for executives who are looking for an edge, some way to push their limits and expand their effectiveness” (Peltier, 2001: 23). The secret is to integrate analytic or dynamic thinking into coaching without pathologising the client or the coach/client relationship. In psychodynamic theory, humans perceive the world, particularly other people in the world, based upon their own internal needs, wishes and development (Peltier, 2001: 35).

Peltier defines psychotherapy as facilitating “the growth and development of individuals in intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning, as well as the remediation of problems in those areas” (Peltier, 2001: xviii). This may include one-on-one interpersonal instruction, behaviour analysis, psychological assessment, counselling or psychotherapy. His definition of counselling is that it is personal and deals with personal problems. Coaching in his words,

“carries a much more positive implication in a corporate world; high performers seek it out, for example Tiger Woods” (Peltier, 2001: xviii).

Peltier’s comprehensive view posits the relevance of systems orientation to executive coaching. He explains that in executive coaching we can “draw from the frameworks of humanistic existential behavioural and psychodynamic psychology and choose our techniques eclectically to fit the client, the situation and the need” (Peltier, 2001: xviii). In other words, humanistic psychology, behavioural psychology and existential psychology can help to understand key human concerns and anxieties.

The Centre for Creative Leadership gives the following description of coaching: “executive coaching is the process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective” (Peltier, 2001: xx; *cf.* Peterson, 1996). Sperry defines executive coaching as involving “the teaching of skills in the context of a personal relationship with a learner, and providing feedback on the executive’s interpersonal relations and skills” (Peltier: xviii).

This fits more with my coaching process, except that teaching is not part of the coaching process; asking questions and acting as a thinking partner is. Another definition by Peltier is that coaching is an “ongoing theory of activities tailored to the individual’s current issues or relevant problems designed by the coach to assist the executive in maintaining a consistent, confident focus that he/she tunes strengths and manages shortcomings” (Peltier, 2001: xx). Although broad, this definition seems to be moving more towards the practical which differentiates coaching from therapy.

Peltier’s ultimate definition of coaching is: “Someone from outside an organisation” who “uses psychological skills to help a person develop into a more effective leader. These skills are applied to specific present-moment work problems in a way that enables this person to incorporate them into his/her permanent management or leadership repertoire”.

This is a key definition for me: someone from outside the organisation who uses psychological skills in a practical way to help the executive manage themselves and others more effectively. This brings in the element of emotional intelligence (i.e. self-management and relationship management).

### **2.38.1 The intervention**

Peltier details skills from the psychotherapy literature which are useful to the executive coach:

- Active listening and empathy

- Self-awareness
- Process observation
- Giving and getting feedback
- Assertive communication
- Conflict resolution
- Cognitive restructuring
- Learned optimism
- Effective use of reinforcement
- Hypnotic language
- Resistance management
- De-triangulation
- Reframing
- Paradoxical intent

These are similar themes to those I have picked up in my research of the coaching conversation and which Peltier elaborates on in subsequent chapters. Peltier mentions that the benefit of coaching executives is that “the organisation will perform more effectively, profits will increase, and life will be more comfortable” (Peltier, 2001: xxi). It also means that the executive’s blind spots will be addressed.

Peltier’s dictum resonated with my coaching process: “dynamics that occur in coaching mirror the dynamics that the executive client experiences in the regular world of work” (Peltier, 2001: 40). Insight leads to change, and the coach’s job is to facilitate action and observable change because organisations expect to see clear effective changes that are translatable into deliverables.

The whole aim of the coaching intervention, in his model, is to:

1. help clients understand and manage themselves; and
2. enable (not teach) clients to use behavioural methods to manage and improve their own organisations (and their own management of interpersonal communications).

In other words, “interventions are used with goals in mind” (Peltier, 2001: 47). Peltier indicates four general situations where high achievers can benefit from executive coaching (Peltier, 2001: xxii):

1. when big things in the organisation change;
2. skills development for individual transitions;
3. specific skills development; and

4. resolving specific problems.

### 2.38.2 ABC of behaviour management

One of the intervention techniques that Peltier recommends from a behavioural point of view is functional analysis. The underlying belief is that “if something happens to you repeatedly, you are probably reinforcing it in some way”. In other words, behaviour is a “function of its consequences” (Peltier, 2001: 44).

It is useful to look at a specific behaviour and identify what precedes the behaviour, and what are the consequences of that behaviour. In functional analysis the coach helps the client to identify the behaviour, the antecedent and the consequent; this helps the client to decide what changes (if any) can be made to the antecedent in order to change the behaviour and the consequences.<sup>30</sup>

The strength of the behavioural approach is that it encourages measurement (always welcome in any organisation), and identifies when small behavioural changes can make an impact to executives in high positions. The flip side is that it can be problematic to identify and quantify specific behaviours to be changed, and it can be difficult to break down new behaviours into something that is measurable and easy to learn.

Ultimately, the behavioural approach is useful because “frequently a powerful and successful person possesses one or two sets of dysfunctional behaviours that cause repetitive difficulties” (Peltier, 2001: xxiii).

### 2.38.3 Four-step intervention

Peltier (2001) sees coaching as a four-step process:

1. *Get things started*: coaches must define their work in terms of outcomes and solutions, confidentiality, recording relationships, dimensions of the project and contracting (i.e. time, money and methodology).
2. *Gather information and make a plan*: with executives it is important to develop a clear plan that includes measurable outcomes (executives work best to a development plan with clear goals and end points).
3. *Implement*: this can be for a period from three months up to two years to produce results, develop skills, achieve objectives; this will include work shadowing, when the coach walks alongside the executive in the workplace and observes the client in action.
4. *Lock in the changes*: the coach should arrange for ongoing improvement and support, for short-term gains to be translated into long-term gains.

#### **2.38.4 The relationship**

Peltier quotes Corey (1982: 90): “the therapeutic relationship then is the critical variable, not what the therapist says or does”. It was Robert Cooper who said: “if you take care of the soft stuff,” (trust, loyalty, communication skills, commitment) “the hard stuff takes care of itself” (Peltier, 2001: 67; *cf.* Cooper, 1997). Peltier also advised, “people first, projects second ... the single most important factor in business leadership is the relationship” (Peltier, 2001: 67).

To develop the relationship effectively, Peltier looks at the principles and concepts of the Rogerian, person-centred approach. The Rogerian approach is relationship-oriented, experiential, grew out of the existential tradition in philosophy, and has an underlying humanist vision. Peltier describes it as particularly American: i.e. pragmatic, optimistic, and believing in the unlimited potential of the individual (Peltier, 2001: 68).

Similar to the approach suggested by Yalom and Spinelli, Rogerian theory requires that the therapist listen with acceptance and without judgment if clients are going to be able to change (Peltier, 2001: 68).

The goal of therapy, according to Peltier, is to “provide a climate conducive to help the individual become a healthy and fully functioning person” (Peltier, 2001: 70). The core skills of the client-centred approach – i.e. active listening, respecting clients and adopting their internal frame of reference – is in alignment to achieving results within the coaching conversation. However, it is crucial to refer pathology appropriately and to keep coaching and therapy separate.

#### **2.38.5 What therapy offers coaching**

Coaching in Peltier’s terms is action-oriented, data-driven, present moment focused, designed for a high functioning client, and has complex confidentiality issues until secured. Therapists can offer insight into: the dynamics and motivations of others; adult development; effective listening skills (restatement, summarising, physically listening); resistance; and co-operation.

The positive themes to be gained from therapy which impact the coaching intervention are: insight, awareness of the goal, self-examination, intra-personal understanding, talking about things (i.e. making things explicit), rapport building, and special relationship feedback from an impartial party in a confidential relationship.

The basic ingredients of the executive coaching relationship are, according to Peltier, based on a few common themes from the psychology literature. He quotes Sperry, Diedrich, Kilburg, Hutcheson, Witherspoon and White, although I have paraphrased and reordered these themes:

- Active listening.
- Adopting the client's internal frame of reference.
- Being a confidante, listener, personal advisor.
- Being engaging and responsive.
- Building trust and understanding.
- Coaching for skill, performance, development, and the executive's agenda.
- Directing the client toward a desired outcome.
- Empathy.
- Equal working partnership.
- Forging the partnership.
- Listening skills.
- Providing challenge and support.
- Understanding the dynamics of human behaviour.
- Offering an active partnership.
- Offering two-way feedback.
- Patience.
- Respecting clients.
- Objective, trustworthy source of feedback.
- Wanting to empower others by helping them to take responsibility for change.

In terms of the coaching intervention, Peltier (2001: 73) suggests applying Rogerian principles for success:

1. Create a genuine, authentic, one-on-one relationship with the client.
2. Achieve accurate empathy through unconscious positive regard and acceptance.
3. Really hear the client and fully accept him/her as s/he currently is.
4. Reflect what you hear back to the client so that he or she can fully appreciate their situation as it is.

#### **2.38.6 Active listening**

Active listening is listed as a competency (a set of specific skills) which I have restructured as: listening for feelings; giving feedback on specific listening skills; giving feedback on the



impression they make on you; paraphrasing; physical listening; reflection; restatement; and summarising.

Three key themes to emerge from Peltier's work in terms of the coach's intervention in the conversation with the client are *active listening, respecting the client, and adopting the client's internal frame of reference*. All three would be reflected in the language (verbal and non-verbal stance) of the coach's attitude and approach.

### **2.38.7 Cognitive psychology**

Peltier's introduction of cognitive psychology is useful as the coach is essentially a 'thinking partner' to the client. This is why I found Nancy Kline's thinking skills so useful for the coach. Cognitive psychology is the study of the mind and its patterns: cognitive psychology has to do with memory, perception, and formation of language and the roles of various brain functions (hence my interest in NLP which is grounded in behavioural and cognitive psychology).

The idea behind cognitive therapy is that people can learn to notice and change their own thoughts with powerful emotional and behavioural benefits (Peltier, 2001: 82). Cognitive psychology focuses on conscious rather than unconscious thinking processes. The philosophy behind cognitive psychology (similar to NLP) is that what you choose to think determines what you feel and what you do; specific thoughts create and control feelings, and thinking is largely within the realm of individual control.

Peltier explores fifteen distorted thinking styles which could prove useful for a coaching intervention. But perhaps more generally useful is a six-step cognitive method which is very adaptable to the business environment (Peltier, 2001: 90-98). The premise of this intervention is that it requires an executive who can notice their own thinking patterns to: explore the problem; study the data to understand the problem; develop a plan focused on thinking patterns; dispute the problem thinking; develop new thinking to replace the old; and reward and support the new thinking.

### **2.38.8 Family therapy and business**

What is helpful about family therapy theory for the executive coach is the abandonment of linear thinking. "People are best understood in terms of the role they play in their organisation and in the way that things stay the same" (Peltier, 2001: 111-113). From a systems point of view this helps the client to explore the organisation as if it were a family.

Specific coaching interventions deal with role theory: i.e. family roles such as star, blamer, hero, rebel, martyr, scapegoat, distracter, cheerleader, jester, invalid, placator, favoured son,

mascot, saint, and sceptic. In family therapy the 'person' is not the 'role'; yet in a family there can be a pretence that allows the family to stay the same. Triangularity is useful when a coalition occurs outside of the formal hierarchy which results in the formation of unhealthy alliances.

Systems tend towards equilibrium and clients often take on roles which may not be useful. The strength of operating from a systems point of view is that the coach becomes more concerned with the structure of behaviour, and the effectiveness and health within an organisation. The flip side is that a systems approach can leave the client powerless if the system is dysfunctional or unlikely to change.

### **2.38.9 Social psychology**

Social psychology is the study of social influence, in other words how people influence each other. Peltier acknowledges social psychology's contribution to leadership, persuasion, conformity, influence and coercion, group think, field theory and cognitive dissonance. The basic premise is that we must pay attention to "social influences if we are to effectively lead, manage and change" (Peltier, 2001: 138).

Kurt Lewin's field theory introduced a way to help coaching clients cope with their social environment. The basic premise is that behaviour is a function of the person and the environment. An intervention suggested by Peltier is Silberman's (1996) model for change, which I have rephrased as a coaching question framework:

1. What is the situation now?
2. What is the situation as I want it to be?
3. What will keep the situation from changing?
4. What action steps can I take?
5. What resources are needed to make the change?

Peltier posits that one of the reasons that people feel they cannot change is that they would have to acknowledge they were previously wrong. He mentions the components of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills) and uses Goleman's definition of emotional intelligence: "the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships (Goleman, 1996: 317).

Peltier's model for understanding social psychology is useful for the executive coach (Peltier, 2001: 152):

1. Treat each case and client as an on-going field study; treat it as research.

2. As a coach, remember the power of a situation (the situation is more influential than personal qualities or individual character). Remember to examine the social environment and teach your clients about organisational climate and culture.
3. Remember that we all suffer from self-delusion (cognitive dissonance causes us to make mental adjustments that are inaccurate).
4. Help your clients with self-presentation.
5. Assess and teach emotional intelligence – social factors are important to your client's long-term success.

Peltier's interventions tend to be guideline-oriented more than recommending a specific use of language. Within my own research project I found two patterns emerging: one a structure of themes (as in Peltier's above), as well as the emergence of specific types of questions within the stages of the coaching process.

#### **2.38.10 The existential stance**

Peltier sees existentialism as having made a powerful impact on psychotherapy. "Each human has no fixed essence, except as it is shown through moment to moment behaviour, which can always change; our choice defines us not our personality" (Peltier, 2001: 156; *cf.* Heidegger).

Choice and change are key components in my coaching model as a way of taking responsibility for defining oneself. According to Sartre, "authenticity *vs.* self-deception is the absolute personal responsibility," (Peltier, 2001: 157). "We cannot make life deliver what we want, but we can control what we think and desire; rigorous self-disciplined thought is the key" (Peltier, 2001: 158; *cf.* Olson, 1962: 11).

Not specifically an intervention, but ten guidelines are offered for the executive coach by Peltier: honour individuality; encourage choice; get going; anticipate anxiety and defensiveness; commit to something; value responsibility taking; manage conflict and confrontation; create and sustain authentic relationships; welcome and appreciate the absurd; clients must figure things out in their own way.

These guidelines fit well with my current model and its component parts of reflection and awareness; taking responsibility; setting goals; personal growth and change: i.e. reflect on anxiety, make choices, develop insight and awareness, use language appropriately, set goals and take action. Peltier posits that "authentic individualism requires extensive self-examination and the willingness to live with the decisions one makes as a result" (Peltier, 2001: 168). This is however, in contrast with the principle of Ubuntu in African cultures, where it is not so much individualism that is important, but relationship within the community.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.38.11 Lessons from sports coaches

What has emerged from the success of athletic coaches is the importance of dreaming and setting goals; aligning everything and going for it. Athletic coaches introduced the concept of ‘balance’ in one’s life: where does work fit into your life and dreams; how driven do you want to be? On the other hand, “positive mental health and self-esteem are greatly enhanced when a person is excellent at something” (Peltier, 2001: 170). Peltier (2001) suggests a second range of guidelines to intervene with the client:

1. Consciously choose (single mindedness or balance).
2. Teach fundamental competencies and skills (coaches viewed themselves as teachers).
3. Use individual approaches (be flexible and ingenious).
4. Play against yourself; set goals relevant to your own progress.
5. Visualise (use covert rehearsal imagery as in NLP).
6. Use video feedback; rehearse important conversations and interactions prior to execution.
7. Learn from defeat (often the best lessons are from failure).
8. Communicate trust and integrity.

### 2.38.12 Failure intervention

One intervention to emerge from the above guidelines is how to learn from failure: i.e. the *coach* must empathise with the client; discern how the client views the failure; and explain that it can be a turning point. The *client* then makes the decision to change, looks at how to view things differently and learns something completely new which is put into practice. A crucial component to learn from failure is awareness.

### 2.38.13 Coaching women in business

“Women can transform the workplace by expressing, not giving up their personal values” (Peltier, 2001: 188; Naisbitt and Aburdene, 1986). However, women work from a range of limiting assumptions – not due only to their own limited sense of their capabilities; men and women assume that the family is woman’s highest priority; and these assumptions are reinforced by the culture of organisations.

In working with my women clients, these assumptions surface as well as their impact on women’s self-belief and self-confidence to do the same job as a man. “It is absurd to put a woman down for having the very qualities that would send a man to the top” (Schwarz, 1989: 69). The differences cited by Peltier which can be explored with an executive coach are: communication style; task *vs.* relationship; image; taking credit; speaking up; and leadership style. All of these emerge time and again in the coaching conversations with my female clients.

Peltier lists some of the communication characteristics of women in the workplace; men and women use different communication styles (Tannen, 1994). For example, women make requests or suggestions rather than making a direct injunction; some women apologise compulsively and unnecessarily; women say thank you as a way to sustain positive feelings in a relationship; women ask for an opinion as a way to show consideration for another; men and women may use praise and criticism differently; women use 'trouble talk' as a form of rapport builder; women (some men do this) communicate indirectly and indirectness is confusing to others (Peltier, 2001: 195-197).

#### **2.38.14 Interventions in working with women executives**

Peltier (2001) suggests:

1. Help your clients figure out the unwritten rules and gender codes;
2. Encourage your client to find an informal mentor within the organisation;
3. Help your women clients to develop a career plan or succession plan; and
4. Offer support when they become demoralised, having to swim upstream in a male-dominated organisation.

My research project has uncovered scenarios of difficulty for my female clients (C1, C3, C6, C12, and C14). What is most helpful is to assist them with understanding the written and unwritten gender codes within the organisation and help them decide what to do about the gender difficulties they face which are often power-oriented.

#### **2.38.15 Worker, manager and leader issues**

Peltier posits that leadership coaches often try to fix problem people, or help the individual make a transition from one career to another. What is more useful is to guide the leader helping them to learn from their own leadership experience and their mistakes, to take challenging assignments early in their career, and to ensure they have extensive mentoring and time for reflection. The four overall intervention themes suggested by Peltier (2001) are to:

1. Coach for skills where there is a deficit.
2. Focus on the executive's current job and their performance.
3. Coach for development to move to the next level.
4. Coach to the executive's agenda.

#### **2.38.16 Ethics in coaching**

Part of my doctoral research project has been to spearhead and develop COMENSA (Coaches and Mentors of South Africa); this has proved immensely useful in developing an ethics code

and an ethical approach to coaching. Peltier appropriately quotes Robert Solomon (1997): “the search for excellence, whatever it may be, begins with ethics” (Peltier, 2001: 222). He explains that executive coaches have to navigate two types of cultures: the business culture which is a proprietary culture based on market enterprise; and the individual client culture which cultivates the ethics of care, and where looking after client’s best interests engenders a cooperative culture.

In terms of client intervention Peltier (2001: 224) suggests three overall steps:

1. Develop clear written contracts with clarity from the beginning of the relationship about confidentiality and boundary issues.
2. Whistle-blow when colleagues behave poorly or are found to be incompetent.
3. Know your limits and practice within those limits with supervision.

The second step is one most coaches would overlook, not wanting to damage their image in the marketplace. However, without having ethical guidelines to work from (unlike psychotherapists) coaches need to establish the norms through their working practices.

### **2.38.17 In conclusion**

The clear message in Peltier’s book is to focus on the single thing that one does best as an executive coach to create sustainable competitive advantage and to be exceptional.

### **2.39 Executive coaching with backbone and heart (O’Neill)**

Mary Beth O’Neill (2000) focuses on patterns of behaviour and coaching conversations with leaders to develop their business goals. Her style is action- and systems-oriented. She makes many suggestions about the framework the executive coach works within and suggests questions inside those frameworks to help the coach intervene successfully with the client.

O’Neill describes the essence of coaching as “helping leaders get unstuck from their dilemmas and assisting them in transferring their learning into results for the organisation” (O’Neill, 2000: xiii). She has coined the term ‘signature presence’: “there is a need for coaches to use their own *presence* with the client” (O’Neill, 2000: xiv). Signature presence means using one’s presence in the moment at the time of intervention.

My focus is to analyse her comments regarding the coach’s intervention.

### 2.39.1 The change effort

According to O'Neill the key to change is when leaders face their own challenges; how the coach "manages herself in relation to an executive facing those challenges can make the critical difference in the coaching outcome and therefore the business outcome" (O'Neill, 2000: xv). It is important for the coach to recognise the larger systems at play and the 'force field' that shapes and influences all the individuals working within the system. Therefore coaches need to hold a "bifocal" view being able to see their client in the system, as well as seeing oneself in the system.

In the coaching conversation O'Neill advocates three core principles for the coach: (1) self-management; (2) a systems perspective and a methodology; (3) the use of backbone and heart. She cites four phases of coaching using a systems lens (O'Neill, 2000: xvii): *contracting, planning, live action intervening and debriefing*.

The mistake of the executive coach is to falsely assume that the relationship between executive coach and leader happens in isolation from the dynamics of the executive's team. In other words, the coaching relationship is set within the *context* of the team and the organisation; it is part of the overall system within which the leader works. This has huge implications for the coach's interventions with the leader.

### 2.39.2 Question sequences

According to O'Neill (2000: 5-7), the coach's question framework needs to embrace four essential ingredients with complementary questions:

1. Have a results orientation related to a leader's problem.  
(*What business challenges are you facing? How much time have you got?*)
2. Be a partner to the leader.  
(*What keeps you from getting the results you want?*)
3. Develop an ability to engage the executive in specific leadership challenges.  
(*What is challenging for you about this situation given the disappointing results?*)
4. Link team behaviours to bottom-line goals, pointing out the need to set specific expectations for their teams.  
(*Let's start with you defining more specifically what you expect from your team that would directly lead to higher results; now let's look at what will be required of you to produce those results through your team*).

Here the coach works to identify limiting assumptions or limiting paradigms – those things holding the client back from achieving their desired outcome. The core principles to guide

executive coaches are: *bring your signature presence to the coaching process; use a systems perspective in your coaching practice; apply a coaching method.* This would mean working with a specific coaching model.

### 2.39.3 The coaching intervention – principles

O'Neill's number one principle is to "*Bring your own signature presence to coaching as the major tool of intervention*" (O'Neill, 2000: 8-9). The coaching relationship needs to be built on trust (the ability to mutually give and receive feedback); the ability to be *present* (on the part of both the coach and the leader); to learn from experience (both coach and leader); and be a highly interactive process.

O'Neill's second principle is that using a "*systems perspective keeps you focused on fundamental processes. These forces either promote or impede the interactions and results of the executives you coach*" (O'Neill, 2000: 8-9). O'Neill advocates viewing an organisation systemically; she uses a bottom right hand quadrant similar to Ken Wilber's (2000) claiming it is the largest sphere: i.e., strategic alliances, the global economy, the natural environment and geopolitical shifts.<sup>32</sup>

The third principle is that "*applying a coaching method is powerfully effective when you also use the first two principles, bringing your signature presence and using a systems approach*" (O'Neill, 2000: 10). One of her classic beliefs is that it is important for the executive coach to embed the "belief that leaders have within them most of the resources they need to address the very issues that seem most daunting". Your signature presence is what will help reinforce a systems perspective which will ensure the leader does not get lost in the machinations of the organisation.

### 2.39.4 Developing coaching interventions with backbone and heart

O'Neill defines backbone as saying what your position is whether it is popular or not. She defines heart as staying in the relationship with the leader, and reaching out even when that relationship has its own conflicts. Her first point is in contrast to my model of bracketing the coach's assumptions (O'Neill, 2000: 10-15):

1. Does my client know what I think? How often do I say, 'I agree with you,' or 'I disagree with you' and clearly state why?
2. Do I say what I need from the executive in our working relationship in order to be most effective with him/her?
3. Can I give my position without blame or becoming defensive?
4. Can I state my opinion without jargon or fancy concepts?



5. Can I give hard feedback when I need to?

### 2.39.5 Bringing heart to the coaching intervention

1. Do I understand my client's situation?
2. Can I clearly articulate his/her position and reflect it back?
3. Do I identify and tell the leader the hunches I have about possible deeper reactions, feelings and thoughts he is leaving unsaid?
4. When there is a disagreement or conflict between the leader and me, do I keep engaging with him or do I retreat and disengage?
5. Do I continue to stay in touch?
6. Do I express appreciation for the degree of difficulty a situation may be for a leader and also the degree of accomplishment he has achieved?

O'Neill posits a four-step method in working with executives: *contract, plan, use live action intervening, and debrief*. This approach means achieving a business result while building the capacity of your client to apply what they learn to all their organisational situations.

Not dissimilar to building the relationship between client and therapist, O'Neill advocates not just increasing your tolerance for the ambiguities, challenges and stresses of the leader's situation, but also absorbing "the anxiety and feelings of responsibility from your client" (O'Neill, 2000: 18). Questions for the coach to ask him/herself are:

- Why am I doing what I am doing?
- Is this truly good for the client?
- Am I doing this to lower my own stress, even as I imagine that I act in the client's best interest?

O'Neill spends quite a bit of time on the mental context for the coach: what questions must the coach ask him/herself to bring signature presence to the relationship with the client, and what happens when the coach loses their signature presence.

### 2.39.6 Regaining your presence

To stay responsive rather than reactive and to recover equilibrium more quickly, O'Neill recommends several interventions which will ensure that the coach is not intimidated by the leader or simply runs alongside the leader's viewpoint (O'Neill, 2000: 20-21):

1. Disagree with a specific process the leader is using and continue to understand and support the leader's larger goals.
2. Give your best thinking and refuse to advocate a specific action plan.

3. Challenge the leader's commitment and offer to help the client to be more consistent.
4. Identify and sustain a goal for yourself as coach in each session.
5. Manage yourself in the midst of ambiguity.
6. Increase your tolerance for the reactivity within you and others.
7. Bring immediacy to the moment.

### **2.39.7 Identify and sustain your goal**

O'Neill maintains that sustaining your goals as a coach gives you more focus. There are two types of goals (Yalom, 1980): content (what is to be accomplished) and process goals (how the coach wants to be in a session). If you as coach are aware of your goal, you will stay in response mode rather than automatic when your stress is high. The next step is to ensure your goal is related to your client's goal. This is an interesting way to look at goals. Most executive coaches would first identify the client's goals and guide the client accordingly. O'Neill says be very clear about your goal throughout the session so that you lose neither signature presence nor backbone, nor heart.

### **2.39.8 Manage yourself amid ambiguity**

The steps O'Neill advocates to cultivate decisiveness and to clarify ambiguities (2000: 26-28) are:

- 1 acknowledge the ambiguity;
- 2 distinguish where you are clear and unclear;
- 3 articulate to others your clarity or lack of clarity;
- 4 say what it is you want to do; and
- 5 tell the client what you need.

In my coaching model we would work with the client's limiting assumptions and limiting paradigms, which need to be identified and replaced to make choices, decisions and enhance change. But the coach also works with their own ambiguities and limiting assumptions; therefore it is important the coach is clear about their own goals, the client's goals and what kind of ambiguity is in the situation. O'Neill, like Peltier, gives guidelines for the coaching intervention.

### **2.39.9 Bring immediacy to the moment**

Yalom (1980) recommends being in the here-and-now with the client; O'Neill suggests the coach reports their experience of the client directly to them in the here-and-now by asking questions such as the following (O'Neill, 2000: 37):

1. Scan for parallel occurrences.  
*(Am I the only one whose mind wanders off when she talks?)*
2. Identify your reactions.  
*(Where are we in the here and now?)*
3. Speak directly to the leader about your experience of him/her.  
*(Tell the leader your direct experience and link it to her work world)*
4. Make the connection between your goal and their goal.

The journey of the executive and the coach are parallel journeys. You are helping the leader to find more of his/her own signature presence; at the same time you are being clear and staying connected.

### **2.39.10 Systems thinking and seeing the force field**

O'Neill posits that patterns are created between client and coach; most importantly they can parallel the patterns that develop between the client and the organisation. She talks about the interactional field that is established between two or more people; Spinelli (1989) and Yalom (1980) refer to this when they highlight the importance of the relationship.

In helping clients deal with stressful situations and their reactive responses, the coach must at the same time detect the systems and patterns at work. The metaphor of the spider web describes an interactional force field. If coach and leader are strong, the web can maintain its integrity through many disruptions. But webs have their breaking point, as does an interactional field established between two or more people. Once a third person is introduced into the field, each person's behaviour changes in some way in relation to the invisible field. The questions to ask the client are: *how do I learn about the interactional field? How can I begin to see it?*

The first force field (or organisation) that your clients operate within is that of the family. It is important that the coach helps the client to see how the organisational systems affect them. Coach and client also co-create their own force field.

O'Neill's framework below is to ensure the coach is not pulled into the system's self-perpetuating patterns. The coach begins to experience what the client is experiencing within the system; the coach will start to have similar reactions to the client. For example, my client (C16): her anxieties in the first six months of our work together were often projected onto me in a session. I began to wonder why I was feeling so anxious; I remembered the power of the interactional field between coach and client, and how it was influenced by the organisational system my client was working within.

### **2.39.11 Anxiety in the workplace**

Anxiety is often where I begin working with a client and eventually we move to identify and replace limiting assumptions. The coach “can catch the system’s anxiety” and that is why it is important to be aware of not taking on the anxiety of the client. The coach must be aware of their own internal anxious voice (O’Neill, 2000: 60).

Anxiety seriously challenges the leader’s ability to bring his/her presence to any business situation; anxiety is a reaction to the system and can push the client to a potential breaking point or a *perceived* breaking point. O’Neill says that for the coach, anxiety is an early-warning device.

### **2.39.12 Triangles are the leader’s challenge**

The coach’s number one goal is to help the executive regain their centre whenever a triangular relationship is created. The coach can create a healthy triangle between the leader and his/her dilemma. According to O’Neill, triangles can have a stabilising or a debilitating effect on the system. In the beginning of a relationship with clients often the client prefers to download a problem rather than to face it square on.

My client C1, for example brought her problems with her boss to each coaching session – wanting advice and a quick fix to the problem which she had a part in creating. Although he was a difficult boss, her passive-aggressive reaction to him created an aggressive working atmosphere. My job (in accordance with O’Neill’s model) was to assist my client in recovering her resilience and her understanding that she had the resources to deal with her boss herself. In my coaching model, this would be a matter of creating a new paradigm or worldview to work within.

It takes strength to walk alongside an anxious leader. The coach needs to stay focused on the leader’s anxiety, responding not reacting to their anxiety. Again, O’Neill focuses on the coach’s internal mental environment suggesting that the coach not let his/her internal voices distract them from staying in relationship to an anxious executive who has lost belief in their own personal resources. Be aware of triangulation, i.e. of the coach taking on the executive’s burden because the coach no longer believes in the resourcefulness of the executive.

### **2.39.13 Triangulating**

O’Neill (2000: 63) advocates never stepping in to do the leader’s job. Similarly, Yalom (2001) recommends never making decisions for the client, while Kline (1999) insists that the coach should never do the thinking for the client.

If you lose faith in the executive's ability to face their own dilemmas and to lead, then you have essentially lost faith in your own ability to coach an anxious leader. You have a classic case of triangulation (leader, dilemma and coach) which you must think your way through. In dealing with the leader and anxiety in the workplace, O'Neill advocates a systems perspective as the most useful approach.

#### **2.39.14 The 'triangled' coach**

Awareness of the triangle – leader, leader's challenge and coach – will help the coach to avoid falling into rescue mode. Falling into rescue mode means the coach takes on the leader's burden. Better to help develop client responsibility and to use your "position in the triangle to surface information about the system" (O'Neill, 2000: 68).

O'Neill recommends the client responsibility model where the coach uses his or her position in the triangle to elicit information about the system; then leader and team can actually regain the ability to use their own resources and can continue to relate to each other without the coach solving the problem. Within my model sits 'responsibility' and the anxiety that is aligned to taking responsibility for a decision, a choice or a change (for both coach and client).

These two models, rescue and client responsibility, represent a meta model about when and how to intervene with the leader. In the Client Responsibility Model O'Neill (2000: 69) advises the use of your "signature presence" to keep the client focused. Rather than suggesting specific question interventions, she contrasts the attitudes in the two models.<sup>33</sup>

Some of the suggested question interventions in the client responsibility model are (O'Neill, 2000: 71-72):

- "What I could do is help you think through a number of serious questions you need to answer for yourself".
- "Are you up for this big of a change in how you do things?"
- "If you decide to stay, how does this challenge fit into the goals you have for yourself?"
- "What does successfully fulfilling those goals look like?"
- "How can you find a way to talk to your team so they understand that you stand behind this challenge?"

#### **2.39.15 The four phases of coaching**

The four phases of coaching in O'Neill's model are: contracting, planning, live-action coaching and debriefing. The systems approach of noticing and changing patterns actually

supports action research methodology. Action research is based on the belief that intervention in any phase can create change, not just during the implementation step.

#### **2.39.15.1 Phase 1: Contracting**

In this phase, build the relationship; identify the executive's goals and boundaries for the coaching relationship; and set up expectations for the other phases of coaching. Make explicit to the client what will happen within the entire coaching intervention. I am in agreement with Mary Beth O'Neill; I start coaching during the contracting conversation. Here are several question interventions during the contracting phase:

- How quickly can you get on board with me?
- Do you get what I am talking about?
- Are you practical, effective?
- Do you have some depth to your experience?

Three necessary conditions for a successful coaching contract are the willingness of the executive to: see him/herself honestly; own his/her part in the patterns at play; be receptive to immediate feedback (O'Neill, 2004: 100). Success means contracting and goal setting.

The partnership begins when the leader talks about the specific issue where s/he is currently stuck. In terms of the coach's intervention, O'Neill advocates: listening, being curious about the issue, constantly restating for clarity, and using specific listening skills (Carkhuff, 1969) to build the relationship. In alignment with Peltier, Yalom and Spinelli, the underlying goal in the contracting phase is the development of the relationship. O'Neill suggests an intervention framework around concreteness, empathy, confrontation and respect (O'Neill, 2000: 93-97).

The reason that I begin coaching within the first contracting conversation is to move straight away into having a conversation about client issues. If you only contract in the first session without beginning the coaching process, there is a risk that the client remains confused about why they are actually there. They begin to understand how you work and it helps the client to decide about the reality of working with you.

What O'Neill terms the partnership (O'Neill, 2000: 93) I call the relationship; it begins when the leader or the executive actually begins to talk about the specific issue where they are currently stuck. In my coaching model discussing the issues is the first step (input); the second step is to identify what are the limiting assumptions and where the client is getting stuck (throughput); and how they can be addressed (output). O'Neill's (2000: 94) recommended coaching intervention questions in the contracting phase are:

- "What recurring patterns are present in this situation?"

- “Which patterns work well and which detract from the effort?”
- “How are you a part of these patterns?”
- “How have you responded to this issue?”
- “What is your knee-jerk contribution?”
- “Can you imagine a different pattern?”
- “How willing are you to develop the stamina required to stop your part of the pattern that is no longer effective?”
- “How will this help you get to your goal?”
- “How can I be useful to you?”

O’Neill suggests interventions at specific stages in her four-step model, and in alignment with certain themes (concreteness, empathy, confrontation, respect). What I am looking for in my project analysis are the coaching interventions that happen within certain stages of the model:

- A. *Concreteness* – invite the executive to be more specific about their issue:
  - What specifically frustrates you?
  - Can you give me an example?
  - What do you mean?
  - When did this happen?
  - What specifically do you expect from her?
- B. *Empathy* – make an effort to ‘show’ you understand the leader’s concerns:
  - You seem most concerned about ...
  - Do you mean you are caught between ...?
  - It seems you are struggling with having to give hard feedback ...
- C. *Confrontation* – pointing out discrepancies between what the leader is saying and what s/he actually does.

Another intervention is “confrontation” which means “pointing out discrepancies between what the leader is saying and what he (or she) actually (says or) does” (O’Neill, 2000: 95). It is important that the coach brings this out in a neutral tone, pointing out the discrepancy descriptively (for example, you say excellence is your number one concern, but in the last ten minutes ...)

- D. *Respect* – believing the executive has the ability to handle their situation.

Respect is seen as an intervention in the sense that the coach holds a deep belief that the client has the “capacity and the resources to handle and resolve the situation” (O’Neill, 2000: 97). If the client welcomes self-reflection then you have a good potential client (O’Neill, 2000: 97). This keeps the coach in the client responsibility model.

**2.39.15.2 Goal-setting interventions**

The coach is responsible to ensure that goal-setting conversations get the best results. But it is best if goal-setting is slowed down to speed up action later. O'Neill (2000: 104) differentiates between two kinds of goals (business and personal), and links the coaching effort to a business result highlighting and prioritising the business areas that need attention. Business goals are about achieving external results; personal goals are what the leader has to do differently in how s/he conducts himself to get the business results. The three types of goals are Robert Crosby's (1988):

1. Bottom-line goals – aligned to the reason the organisation exists.
2. Work-process goals – how the work is accomplished.
3. Human relations goals – how people collaborate to accomplish goals.

O'Neill reflects Hargrove (1995) who discusses the use of “breakthrough thinking to achieve stretch goals” (O'Neill, 2000: 104). In setting goals O'Neill's interventions are:

1. What business results are needed?
2. What are the team behaviours needed to be different to accomplish the results?
3. What personal leadership challenges is the executive facing in improving these results and team behaviours?
4. What are specific behaviours the leader needs to enhance or change in him or her?

I edited and changed O'Neill's bullet points into questions. They were statements; but to be an active intervention they make more sense as a question.

**2.39.15.3 Phase 2: Action planning – move the executive to specifics**

Once issues are surfaced and your client has chosen goals, it is important to help the client identify an action plan and focus the leader on her immediate next step, i.e. moving from the dilemma to goal to action.

One question to help the coach focus on the actions of the leader could be “What does (the client) need to do to change their behaviour?” (O'Neill, 2000: 117). O'Neill (2000: 120) insists that the coach needs to talk about “change management roles”. They are sponsor, implementer, agent, and advocate. Her basic questions are (O'Neill, 2000: 120-121):

1. Is the leader dealing with the right issue?
2. Is the leader talking to the right person?
3. Who has the decision-making authority on this issue? If it is the leader, which decision does she or he need to make and what to delegate?
4. How does the leader wish to increase participation within the work group?



5. Are the groups related to the issue clear about their roles? Do they know to whom they are accountable and for which items and what is the leader's responsibility to those groups?

#### **2.39.15.4 Phase 3: Live-action coaching**

O'Neill defines live-action coaching as the coach being present in real time with the leader in the workplace. One of the reasons she recommends live-action coaching is to help the client move from ineffective routine behaviours with their team and to give the coach an opportunity to observe. The types of interventions that O'Neill suggests (2000: 138) are:

1. "The discussion has become disjointed; what do you want to focus on right now?"
2. "A decision was just made and I don't think there's clarity among the team what it was."
3. "Are you ready to move on?"
4. "You have exceeded your announced time limit for this topic."

The challenge of a live-active coaching session is for the coach to know when to be quiet and when to say or do something. Her motto is stay active and out of the way (O'Neill, 2000: 143). She describes the importance of avoiding the rescue model when in live action coaching, but recommends breaking a pattern and making an intervention when the leader needs to make a shift in order to achieve success in a session. The majority of her suggestions are in the line of guidelines rather than live interventions. For example, she says that interventions may take the form of directives, questions, suggestions, or debriefing on the spot.

#### **2.39.15.5 Debriefing (define a learning focus)**

Always build debriefing into the coaching contract. There are four categories to the debriefing session:

1. "Celebration of achievements"
2. "Identification of key recurring patterns"
3. "Assessment of the alignment of roles"
4. "Development of a plan"

Within my coaching process, at the end of a coaching session to fully integrate the learning with goals set, and commitment to action – we complete a learning contract (amended from Harri-Augstein's *Learning Conversations*) to:

- Redefine the vision, where the client is going.
- Outline the strategy, how the client is going to achieve the vision.
- Identify the specific outcomes that need to be accomplished in the next few weeks in order to work towards achieving the vision and putting the strategy into action.

- Summarise what the client gained from the session in order to help underline self-reflection and continue to help the client to understand that they are responsible for their own thinking, their own doing, and their own being.

In terms of interventions, what is interesting in O'Neill's systemic approach is that she suggests questions for the coach to ask him/herself, as well as looking at what are the interventions into the coaching conversation to move the client towards achievement of the desired outcome. Questions such as: "What would I do if I weren't hooked and my client was open?" (O'Neill, 2000: 167). This challenges the coach to give straightforward feedback to the leader and to notice what the patterns are.

### **2.39.16 Coaching interventions**

O'Neill advocates that the coach listen well, and help the executive to gain clarity about what the issue is, the goals to accomplish and next steps. Give feedback of your own experience of the client inside their dilemma that will shed light on how s/he is leading this particular effort. If the client is resistant, use a form of advocacy to promote an idea or a solution. O'Neill suggests always working from the client responsibility model. O'Neill's recommended questions for contracting, setting goals, planning, patterns, boundaries and debriefing are in the endnotes.<sup>34</sup>

### **2.39.17 In conclusion**

O'Neill talks about "coaching moments" which happen outside of the formal coaching contract but within the concerns and the world of the leader. She says that coaching moments happen when you intervene in three ways:

1. Listen well to the leader
2. Help the leader get more clarity about the issue, the goals to accomplish and next steps
3. Give feedback of your experience as coach to the leader that can shed light on how the executive is leading this particular effort.

Finally, O'Neill ends on a note that I am in alignment with, "The more I open myself to being coached, the more I know in my bones what my clients experience" (O'Neill, 2000: 208).

## **2.40 Masterful coaching (Hargrove, 2003)**

*"Inspire an 'impossible future' while producing extra ordinary leaders and extra ordinary results"* is the theme of Robert Hargrove's book, *Masterful Coaching, Inspire an Impossible*

**Future** (2003). The book looks at how to transform individuals and groups and identifies the ‘secrets’ of masterful coaches.

His first insightful comment is that there is no coaching method widely accepted and applied by leaders and managers, and that no real professional standards exist for practitioners (Hargrove, 2003: 1).

Hargrove’s (2003: 2) definition of coaching is that it “is about expanding people’s capacity to create an extra ordinary future, that it involves personal and organisational reinvention, and that it takes place in the domain of accomplishment, not psychology”. Hargrove espouses accomplishment where John Whitmore (2002) espouses performance.

#### **2.40.1 Mental models**

Hargrove mentions the mental models required to be a masterful coach, and advocates partnership with those being coached: “commitment unlocks the wisdom, intuition and the natural knowing needed to coach people effectively in any situation”. He advocates that it is helpful to have a mental map or coaching model.

Hargrove describes his three step ‘guru/catalyst’ process to “create a powerful new future that requires personal and organisational reinvention” (Hargrove, 2003: 7). I question a guru/catalyst model as I work from the presupposition that the coach is not a teacher; the coach’s job is to help the client unblock limiting assumptions that are preventing the client from finding their way. Hargrove’s guru/catalyst intervention is in three steps which I believe may be based on Kurt Lewin’s model, “unfreeze, transform and refreeze” (Hargrove, 2003: 232; cf. Lewin, 1999: 282). Hargrove’s model is: unfreeze, change, and refreeze.

*Refreeze* is about making new ways of thinking or behaviour smooth and automatic, through practice and study. *Unfreeze* refers to the heat of the guru that acts as a catalyst to “initiate and call into question underlying thinking patterns or practices” (Hargrove, 2003: 7) that get the client into trouble (that may be true; the coach helps clients think about their blind spots). *Change*, a coach who acts as a guru/catalyst can provide guiding ideas with the intention of “helping people make a fundamental shift in their thinking practices”. Perhaps, but if you are providing guiding ideas it seems you are more of a mentor or consultant. I find the term and concept of ‘guru’ unhelpful. I refer back to Kline (1999) who says the thinker has the best ideas; in this instance the thinker is the coach. Hargrove claims that his work is transformational not transactional.

### **2.40.2 Transforming individuals**

I would agree with Hargrove's statement, if you want to reinvent the organisation reinvent yourself first. This is essentially emotional intelligence (self-awareness leads to self-management and social awareness). Hargrove has invented a new coaching language: the book explains in consummate detail how to create an "impossible future for personal and organisation reinvention" (Hargrove, 2003: 9).

Hargrove agrees that coaching happens in conversations. One of his techniques is the six-cap coaching conversation which seems to be an adaptation of de Bono's (1988) six thinking hats. He begins every coaching conversation with this statement: "It is my intention that this conversation makes a difference for you."

Hargrove defines coaching as "supporting people to be extraordinary leaders, as well as to achieve extraordinary levels of performance and goal" (Hargrove, 2003: 15). Similar to John Whitmore (2002), Hargrove works at the level of achievement and performance; this moves us away from a psychological model of coaching, to work with levels of change and learning.

Hargrove provides a methodology and a road map for the masterful coach; there are five compass points to 'map the territory' (Hargrove, 2003: 18).

### **2.40.3 Compass point 1: Coaching is a powerful partnership**

Hargrove quotes Michael Jordan telling Tiger Woods: "No matter how good they say you are, set incredibly high goals and keep working on your game" (Hargrove, 2003: 20). This point is to ensure the client continually works on performance; it is more horizontal than vertical in terms of development. It is about practice, practice, practice and embedding the new pattern. It is about getting to the next level by "setting ambitious goals and aspirations" and "creating a concrete plan" (Hargrove, 2003: 22). Most executive coaches work with a similar philosophy, creating a leadership development plan as a road map.

### **2.40.4 Compass point 2: Stand in the future people want to create**

A masterful coach stands in the impossible future that the clients are committed to. It is about "producing extra ordinary results and creating a climate of possibility and opportunity". Both coach and client set the bar high for themselves and define an impossible future by "creating big hairy audacious goals (BHAGs)". The coach must work with a 'teachable' point of view (TPOV) (Hargrove, 2003: 27).

**2.40.5 Compass point 3: Leaders must reinvent themselves first**

This parallels Flaherty's ontological approach (1999) and Wilber's integral approach (1997). "You can't transform the organisation without transforming yourself (Hargrove, 2003: 32). But all humans are resistant to change; this is the value of clients working collaboratively with the coach. He advocates ripping "the blinders off to make people aware of what they are unaware of". This is to move the client out of unconscious incompetence – empower clients to commit to new ways of being and to bring that into the organisation.

**2.40.6 Compass point 4: A coach is a thinking partner**

Although not a new thought, it is crucial for the coach working in conversation with the client. Hargrove advocates starting with the issue of business strategy and then looking at recognising and dispersing personal organisational defensive routines. Hargrove introduces Chris Argyris' ladder of inference.<sup>35</sup>

**2.40.7 Compass point 5: Expanding people's ability to take successful action**

Hargrove advocates that the coach focus on speaking and listening in a manner that enables people to go beyond answers and come to a moment of true insight (this seems somewhat contradictory to his teachable point of view). This resonates with my model of coaching and where I work in the coaching conversation; the coach should intervene only to help the client develop their own insights. Hargrove says the acid test is "did the person go back to work and take some powerful actions?" (Hargrove, 2003: 40).

Hargrove says there are three coaching intervention actions: single-, double- and triple-loop learning to help clients take successful action. Hargrove focuses on learning; he advocates that the masterful coach ask "penetrating" questions:

- What unintended results are you getting?
- How are you contributing?
- How are you looking at things now?
- How do you need to look at things differently?
- How could you look at the problem or solution in a different way?
- Were you stuck in an old pattern?

## **2.41 The coaching intervention**

*It's who you are being, not just technique*

Hargrove says a coach is something that you 'be'. He asks whether the coach is 'being' or 'doing' when helping clients inside the coaching conversation. This is not dissimilar to O'Neill's (2000) signature presence that the coach brings to the conversation.

Hargrove promotes the idea of 'Kokoro', i.e. perfecting one's inner nature. "One must not only master the technique but also perfect the way of being consistent with the discipline, having a calm and centred inner spirit; to be able to teach people; one must perfect his/her own nature" (Hargrove, 2003: 44). The relevance of this comment is that in the western consumer world, as Hargrove acknowledges, we have separated the process of being from the process of learning. O'Neill (2000) also focused on the 'mental model' the coach worked from. Hargrove says we have the power to choose who we are being. Choice is one of the existential concerns in my model and is related to the process of setting goals and taking action. Hargrove often brings in an existential point of view.

### **2.41.1 Language and conversation**

He says the coach can help the client declare new possibilities for themselves through the power of language (the language paradigm). The power to choose who you need to be exists in your conversations, in your speaking and listening, and not in grappling with your history (Hargrove, 2003: 48). This emphasises the performance model *vs.* a psychological model. So within the coaching conversation the coach is not necessarily looking for the psychological paradigm, but listening more to people's language.

This resonates with my linguistic background which predisposes the coach to analyse the context, content, structure and meaning of language when working with clients – either when shadowing them at work or in the coaching conversation.

According to Hargrove masterful coaches make an existential choice to make a difference in the life of an individual, a team or an organisation. He says that it is important to introduce powerful ideas into the client's thinking because that is what has the capability of shifting paradigms. Hargrove's big issue is calling forth questions. In my coaching model, the purpose of questions is to help to create insights, shift limiting assumptions, and help decisions to be made and goals to be set.

But Hargrove insists that if the relationship is to be powerful or profound, it is important the coach provides information that could possibly be difficult or threatening or embarrassing but is necessary for growth and learning.

This is contrary to my coaching model (which is more similar to O'Neill's observations) where the coach's role is to tease out the thinking of the client rather than the coach being the active agent. I would suggest that in Hargrove's model the recommendation that the coach, as 'guru', provide answers is a relatively disempowering relationship and that it renders the client more passive in the thinking process. In my model, the entire focus is to empower the client as the 'active' agent and thinker.

### **2.41.2 Coaching happens in conversations**

The power of conversation is the very reason I have chosen the coaching conversation as the topic of my research. It is within the coaching conversation where change of thinking begins; also the beginning of a change in 'being' and 'doing'. My thoughts are that insight and change must first start in the interior of the person; the coaching conversation is the space where the coach creates a safe thinking environment for the client to be.

### **2.41.3 What is the coaching conversation?**

The coaching conversation has been defined in many ways by different authors. One key point to emerge, however, is that the coach must have a specific way of listening.

Kline's (1999) thinking environment seems to be the most intense process to develop thinking partnership skills on the part of the coach. Her ten competencies and six-stage process is where the coach offers 'catalytic listening' to help the client think for themselves, and begin to find the bedrock limiting assumption holding them back with the presenting issue.<sup>36</sup>

## **2.42 Kline's thinking partnership for coaches**

In Nancy Kline's process the coach works from positive philosophical choice which guides the coach's behaviour and responses to the client in the coaching conversation. According to Kline getting the best from people means getting their best thinking; this means offering them the highest quality attention – asking incisive questions, recognising the individual's strengths and achievements, enticing them beyond an addiction to certainty and to a preference for responsible risk (Kline, 2005: 14). The coaching conversation has six parts. The process starts with an exploration of the client's concerns. The coach asks: "What do you want think about? What more do you think, or feel, or want to say?" (Kline, 2005: 14).

In Part Two the coach asks what further goal would the client like to accomplish in the rest of the session. This is because in part one, the client does their own thinking through the presenting issue, and the coach only asks a few further questions, i.e. “What more do you want to think about? What more do you want to think or feel or say?” When the client says, “I’m done, I think I have finished thinking about that,” only then does the coach ask “what would you like to accomplish in the rest of this session or what goal do you have for the rest of the session?”

Part Three of the Kline process is working with assumptions. This is the area that most interests me as Kline’s process identifies limiting assumptions, and asks the client to choose one to replace – usually a bedrock assumption that is most stopping the client from achieving their goal. This is the primary area of my coaching conversation: helping the client to uncover limiting assumptions that may be holding them back.

Identifying limiting paradigms and replacing them with more empowering paradigms with a specific questioning framework is unique to the Kline and the Best Year Yet (2001) coaching processes.<sup>37</sup> Kline’s question is quite simply, “What are you assuming that is stopping you from (insert goal)? What else are you assuming that is stopping you from (insert goal)?”

Part Three of the Kline process is dealing with assumptions. It is important to find the key limiting assumption relating to the client’s specific goal. The next question is: “Is that assumption true? The coach then needs to ask “what are the client’s reasons for thinking that that assumption is true?”

- What is the key assumption?
- Is that assumption true?
- What are the client’s reasons for thinking that assumption is true?

#### **2.42.1 The transition question**

The next stage in the Kline process is to develop either the transition question (which transitions you to the incisive question) or the invitation question. The transition question is (if the key assumption is true or possibly true): “That’s possible, but what are you assuming that makes that assumption hold you back from achieving your goal?” If the assumption is not true the coach would ask, “As your assumption is not true, what are your words for what is true?” The coach can then move to the incisive question or to the invitation question if there is a misalignment of their view with the three criteria.



### 2.42.2 The invitation question

The invitation question is more complicated. If the client insists their assumption is true or possibly true, and their reasons do not align with *positive philosophical choice, logic and information* – the coach then uses those three criteria to handle the misalignment of the thinker's view.

The coach will invite the client (thinker) to consider another question: "Given that this assumption is stopping you from achieving your goal, what alternative view could you take that would help you to achieve your goal?" In other words what would be a liberating true alternative to that assumption? If the client comes up with a more freeing assumption, the coach asks: Given that (new liberating alternative) how would that help you to achieve your goal?

If the client is not willing to consider a liberating alternative, then this particular intervention will stop here as it will not be possible to remove the limiting assumption.

### 2.42.3 The incisive question

In Part Four, the incisive question asks: "If you knew that (insert liberating true assumption) how would you (insert goal)?" For example, "If you knew that you have figured out these kinds of things before, how would you figure it out to achieve your goal this time?"

The coach asks the client to write down the incisive question and their answers which are usually action steps. This particular question format is a very specific way to deal with clients' limiting assumptions.

### 2.42.4 Recording and appreciation

Part Five is recording the incisive question and the client's answers. Part Six is an important step as it is the acknowledgement and recognition of the other; it is called the appreciation. Both coach and client appreciate a quality about the other that they have noticed – not about the content of the conversation, but a specific quality which the client and coach both display in the outside world. This validates the conversation and the thinking partners.

The reason for inserting the Nancy Kline process at this point is because the coach must have a specific intention when interrupting the client's thinking process. The coaching intervention is not just about the questions that the coach asks; it is the quality of the intervention that catapults the client the next step in their thinking process. Kline's point of view is that if you interrupt the client's thinking you get in the way of their thinking; they will not be able to think clearly because you as coach are bringing your thinking into their process.

One of the learnings here is that, in my own practice as a coach, I operate more and more as a thinking partner, not just as a coach who supposedly has the right questions. Silence can catapult the thinker forward; the quiet thinker is busy thinking (Kline, 1999).

What does not come through in the coaching transcripts that I am working with are the pauses or the silent moments. The lesson here is that the coach must let go of ego, of being right, of having the answers. This is diametrically opposed to Hargrove's process.

Hargrove says it is crucial that the coach "is committed to speaking with ruthless compassion and with a commitment to make a difference" (Hargrove, 2003: 69). He says that to expand people's horizon of possibility or to push them to break the grip and excel beyond old paradigms it is a matter of the coach speaking with "a kind of ruthless compassion" (Hargrove, 2003: 70). This sounds as if the coach identifies the client's limiting assumptions for them, rather than directly making the breakthrough themselves.

### **2.43 Hargrove and the seven-cap conversation system**

This conversation system helps the client to discuss the 'un-discussable'. There are five themes: confront, reflect, advocate, encourage and advocate values which are in alignment with four complementary components: help and support, respect for others, strength, and honesty.

The main purpose of these interventions is to help the client understand the misalignment between what they are thinking and what they are saying or doing. The seven-cap conversation system outlines the seven themes for the coach to intervene in the client's thinking:

1. Declaring new possibilities
2. Thinking partner
3. Drawing others out
4. Reframing
5. Teaching and advising
6. Forwarding action
7. Giving honest feedback

This is an interesting model for the coaching conversation; although Hargrove depicts it as a linear list, I would convert it to a holistic circle. Hargrove gives some examples of the types of questions that could be asked in alignment with each theme. The reframing question could lead to identifying limiting paradigms: "Will the way you have framed the problem give you the

results you want? Do you really think you can shrink your way to greatness with this company or do you think it is time for a growing strategy?”

The *reframing* cap is to help the clients to see themselves differently: i.e. how do they need to see themselves differently? How is the person thinking about the problem? How does his or her thinking need to shift? What is the lens or filter through which the person listens or speaks need to change? The *teaching and advising* cap is to be used when the coach wants to offer caring and candid, practical, wise and well timed advice.

The purpose of the *action* cap is to help the client think about what actions they need to take. The *giving honest feedback* cap is to help the clients become more aware. The process can be used to help the client determine the purpose, goals and intentions of the coaching conversation; the coach must decide which cap will most suit the client’s purpose. Hargrove refers back to emotional intelligence saying that self-awareness needs to be a thinking cap.

In my coaching conversations, I usually end the conversation with the question, “What have you learned from our session today? What have you gained?” Those answers are written into a learning contract at the end of every session (from Harri-Augstein’s (1991) *Learning Conversations*). Those questions are:

- What is the vision for the way forward?
- What is the strategy? In other words how are you going to get there?
- What are your outcomes or goals based on this session?

The learning contract becomes the focus at the beginning of the next session with the client, and is the beginning of the client’s learning or leadership development plan.

According to Hargrove we tell stories about who we are or what has happened to us in our lives and these stories are not just based on facts and events but are simply our interpretation: “We are our stories” (Hargrove, 2003: 87). One of my original research questions was to analyse the clients’ narratives as stories, because “Our stories shape, limit and define our way of being, the way we think, and the way we interact with others; by using our story about ourselves as a reference point we decide how to act in a rational way in any given situation” (Hargrove, 2003: 87).

However, I realised that I was more interested in understanding the coach’s intervention and how that might help the client to identify their limiting paradigms or assumptions, to gain insight and change something that is not working.

### **2.43.1 Triple-loop learning**

Triple-loop learning is a model to help leaders reinvent themselves and produce extraordinary results. This approach works at the level of the coaching intervention. Triple-loop learning is a way to alter the client's way of being; double-loop learning is to alter the client's mental models and therefore their thinking and actions; single-loop learning is primarily tips and techniques. Hargrove proposes that triple-loop learning intervenes in 'who' people are being which in turn influences their thinking (i.e. double-loop learning).

He suggests that individual's horizons of possibility are set by their personal and cultural history; and for organisations, they narrow their horizons of possibility as a result of limiting attitudes and beliefs they have inherited from the organisation's past. Coaches have the ability to help the clients make powerful declarations and begin to dismantle limiting beliefs and assumptions.

To do so, Hargrove's master paradigm and action strategy is based on the work of Chris Argyris. The automatic self determines the way we set goals that compensate for what we believe is not possible: "People don't just have their beliefs; they become their beliefs" (Hargrove, 2003: 94).

### **2.43.2 Rut stories and river stories**

He identifies two kinds of stories people tell about themselves, rut stories and river stories. "Rut stories keep people stuck in the old ways of being and old ways of thinking patterns, which results in inaction. River stories are stories of personal growth, self-renewal, and transformation." (Hargrove, 2003: 96). The coach's intervention is one way to transform rut stories into river stories.

### **2.43.3 Transforming rut stories into river stories**

My interpretation of Hargrove's (2003: 97) intervention sequence is to recognise and interrupt a rut story; understand its true nature and create a river story. Listen for beliefs, assumptions and meaning in people's stories; look for unintended consequences in the story and for other ways to view what happened. To do so, step back from the story, observe the facts and ask "what are new ways of being, thinking and acting?"

These are good interventions for the coach, to have a strong intention to penetrate the illusions under which people may be operating. My only concern is that it requires the coach to make a judgement call; better an observation than a judgement. The coach is trying to help the client break the hold of a paradigm, i.e. the structure of their beliefs and assumptions about a particular story.

Earlier I indicated that Hargrove had created his own language for the coaching conversation, and here he points out the importance of sharing with the client the difference between a rut or a river story, teaching the clients to reflect. It is important to identify and name a story: “creating a meltdown and unfreezing the story and creating the readiness to change” (Hargrove, 2003: 100).

A technique Hargrove names ‘fluid framing’ is to use questions like: “How you see yourself or what happened is one possible interpretation. What are other possible interpretations that would be more inspiring, more empowering, more accurate?” (Hargrove, 2003: 101).

I agree with Hargrove that the coach needs to have “toughness, compassion and skill in order to intervene in people’s learning processes.” He insists that a “successful coaching relationship is always a story of transformation, not just of higher levels of performance” (Hargrove, 2003: 103). In other words, it is not just about performance, it is about the intervention that helps create the change or the insight or the learning.

In many ways Hargrove’s process is quite complex and the language can almost be an obstacle to the interventions he proposes. Double-loop learning is not dissimilar to identifying and replacing limiting paradigms; this ultimately leads to ‘triple-loop’ learning, i.e. helping the client to look at their way of being, not just their way of doing. Identifying limiting assumptions (and paradigms) also leads to the setting of goals (single-loop learning) which helps the client to take action.

According to Hargrove’s thinking the coaching intervention is to question/reflect, confront, advocate, encourage, advocate values and teach. This, in Hargrove’s words is to “skilfully intervene in people’s learning processes” (Hargrove, 1993: 115).

#### **2.43.4 Reinvention paradigm**

Hargrove’s reinvention paradigm suggests interventions to help the client invent an impossible future by declaring an ambitious aspiration and declaring that fulfilling that future is the game the client plays in life. The questions are to declare the impossible *vs.* the predictable future; the stand the client will take (Hargrove will only work with an executive if they create a powerful stand); and transformation *vs.* change. These questions represent a meta-perspective:

- What future do you want?
- What do you commit to?
- Who do you need to be in...?
- What actions or bold promises?

### 2.43.5 Being your stand

Hargrove reiterates that coaching leaders to take a stand starts with engaging them on questions and being a committed listener who draws them out. He lists a range of questions to help leaders take a stand (Hargrove, 2003: 136). These are big picture questions:

1. What do you passionately care about? What really matters to you as a human being, a leader, and a manager?
2. Have you gained some idea of the Impossible Future you want to create? Take your best shot at a vision. Are you ready to stand for that?
3. What specific opportunities do you have in front of you for making a difference, which the timing is right for, if only you dared to take the stand?
4. What is the “big game” you want to play beyond what is predictable or business as usual? Are you ready to toss your hat into the ring?

Hargrove defines leadership as: “extraordinary leadership is simply the result of ordinary people taking a stand for something currently impossible in their reality and acting to make it happen”. He quotes Martin Heidegger who says that “Who you are as a leader creates a ‘clearing’, an opening in the forest that shapes the way others will show up around you” (Hargrove, 2003: 136).

### 2.43.6 Creative collaboration in teams

In creative collaboration, Hargrove’s interventions have become simple questions to work with teams rather than individuals:

1. What is your experience?
2. What works about our conversations with each other?
3. What does not work?
4. What is missing?

With teams, coaches need to encourage dialogue rather than discussion. Hargrove’s philosophy is to transform “combative conversations into a productive dialogue” (Hargrove, 2003: 151; *cf.* Bohm, 1990). Hargrove introduces a new model, the collaborative conversation. This brings together divergent views and perspectives and builds shared understandings and new opportunities.

Hargrove has created the two-day ‘CollabLab’ for teams to accelerate organisational transformation. The purpose is not to provide the group with answers but to create new perspectives. The seven accelerators of the CollabLab could be made relevant to the coaching intervention on an individual level:

1. observe behaviour;
2. ask the client for meaning;
3. decide whether to intervene in the client's interpretation;
4. continue to describe your observations;
5. test that by asking questions;
6. help the client decide how to change behaviour.

This model balances enquiry with advocacy.

### 2.43.7 Tools for empowering individuals and groups

Throughout the book Hargrove picks up an existential theme; he quotes Peter Senge: "I believe we suffer every day, in every single business meeting we go to." He mentions the despair "that many managers feel about being unable to have authentic communication where they discuss the un-discussable, talk about problems openly, and overcome the game playing" (Hargrove, 2003: 174). Therefore being a masterful coach is helping clients to talk about the un-discussables.

To deal with defensive routines and to help individuals and teams deal with the un-discussables Hargrove advocates Chris Argyris' ladder of inference adopted from Don Schon. The left hand side is what the individual is thinking; the right hand side is what the individual is saying.<sup>38</sup> It's similar to uncovering limiting assumptions: first the individual must move down the ladder; usually they "automatically jump high on the ladder and what we want to do is move further down the ladder to deal with assumptions" (Hargrove, 2003: 187).

Hargrove encourages his clients to look at their goals in terms of the unwritten rules of the game (one of the first steps of mastery). Ultimate mastery "involves changing the game and creating new rules" (Hargrove, 2003: 220). His small question framework helps to distinguish the unwritten rule:

- What are the people I am coaching trying to achieve?
- What do they think and feel about the project?
- What are the motivators? Who are the enablers? What are the triggers?

*Motivators* answer the question: "What is important to this person or this group?" *Enablers* answer the question: "Who can help this person or group get what is important to them?" *Triggers* answer the question: "What are the conditions that will trigger the enabler to grant a reward or impose a penalty" (Hargrove, 2003: 227).

Hargrove firmly believes that a masterful coach is first and foremost a teacher. Although true indirectly this view seems to be more akin to mentorship.

### **2.43.8 In conclusion**

Hargrove's final reflection is what I see to be the 'real' masterful coaching intervention (Hargrove, 2003: 277):

- "What are your vision, values, and real goals?"
- "How do you see your next steps?"
- "How can I help?"

This is the real coaching intervention, where the coach can begin to help the client to think for themselves.

## **2.44 Coaching for performance (John Whitmore)**

In *Coaching for Performance* (2002), John Whitmore defines coaching, explains the GROW model, and details question interventions for each stage of GROW. He looks at the nature of questions as he believes that questions and effective listening are the coach's two core skills. His work is clear, concise and eminently useful for the coach to understand the basics of the coaching question frameworks. If there is any criticism to be made, it could be that a greater level of skill is required than just these question frameworks to dig deeper than a superficial setting of goals to improve performance.

Whitmore says that 'so-called' coaches do not really understand the performance-related "psychological principles on which coaching is based" (Whitmore, 2002: 2) and although they use behaviours associated with coaching, such as questioning, they don't actually achieve the results intended. He claims that the "beauty of coaching lies in its depth and impact, and you don't need a degree in psychology to practice it" (Whitmore, 2002: 4).

### **2.44.1 Coaching focuses on future possibilities, not past mistakes**

Whitmore's comments on relationship are similar to Yalom (1980) and Spinelli (1989). "Coaching delivers results in large measure because of the supportive relationship between the coach and the coachee, and the means and style of communication used" (Whitmore, 2002: 7).

Coaching began as a result of sports coaching at American universities. Timothy Gallwey (1982) used the word 'inner' to indicate the "player's internal state" or "the opponent



within one's own head" who is more formidable than the "one on the other side of the net" (Whitmore, 2002: 7). Gallwey claims, "If a coach can help a player to remove or reduce the internal obstacles to their performance, an unexpected natural ability will flow forth without the need for much technical input from the coach" (Whitmore, 2002: 8).

This is the specific area of the coaching conversation which interests me: identifying and replacing limiting assumptions. It is one of the reasons that I selected a professional golfer (C5) to be one of my six clients in this research project. I wanted to see if there was any difference in the coaching conversation between a business executive and a professional golfer playing in the highly competitive international arena.

The essence of Whitmore's coaching is "unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them" (Whitmore, 2002: 8). He claims that Gallwey's book coincided with the emergence of a more optimistic psychological model of humankind than the old behaviourist view.

The metaphor suggested by Whitmore (2002: 9) is that "we are more like an acorn, which contains within it all the potential to be a magnificent oak tree".

Whitmore defines coaching as directly concerned with the immediate improvement of performance and development of skills by a form of tutoring or instruction; he defines mentoring as concerned with acquiring skills in a developing career by advising and counselling (Whitmore, 2002: 12). The two key principles associated with his GROW model are awareness and responsibility. This is in accordance with many other coaching models that align a number of competencies within a specific coaching framework

Whitmore cites key blocks (or limiting paradigms) to success in the workplace. He says "the single universal internal block is unfailingly the same, variously described as fear of failure, lack of confidence, self-doubt and lack of self-belief" (Whitmore, 2002: 17). He mentions the external blocks that obstruct the potential performance of a client; for example, restrictive practices within a company, lack of encouragement and opportunity, or the current management style. But it is usually the internal blocks that really prevent the achieving of performance.

#### **2.44.2 The coaching intervention**

John Whitmore defines coaching *itself* as an intervention whose goal is to build self-belief regardless of the content, task or issue. Whitmore claims coaching is not merely a technique

but rather “a way of managing, a way of treating people, a way of thinking, a way of being” (Whitmore, 2002: 18).

### **2.44.3 Existential concerns: relationship, freedom and responsibility**

Whitmore focuses on the question of relationship; “relationship between the coach and coachee must be one of partnership in the endeavour of trust, of safety and of minimal pressure” (Whitmore, 2002: 20). Picking up the existentialist themes of freedom and responsibility, he says that, “when a manager gives a subordinate freedom of choice, the manager has abdicated responsibility”, even though “the buck still stops with him (or her)”; and that coaching “provides the manager with real, not illusionary control, and provides the subordinate with real, not illusionary responsibility” (Whitmore, 2002: 23).

Whitmore’s argument is that coaching for performance is a means to obtain optimum performance, but that it demands fundamental changes in attitude, in managerial behaviour and in organisational structure. He defines management coaching as “the management style of a transformed culture” (Whitmore, 2002: 28). Whitmore sees coaching as a competence and a tool for managers. Key existential themes to emerge from his model are: responsibility demands choice; choice implies freedom. He says because stress has reached epidemic levels worldwide, and people are allowed little personal control in the workplace that this has impacted heavily on self-esteem. “Self-esteem is the life force of the personality, and if that is suppressed or diminished so is the person” (Whitmore, 2002: 30).

### **2.44.4 Awareness and responsibility**

The foundation of the early stages of my model was self-esteem, communication and emotional intelligence (including motivation). Awareness and responsibility have become key elements of the current model; Whitmore picks up on these two existential themes.

Whitmore defines awareness as a product of focused attention, concentration and clarity; and not dissimilarly to O’Neill (2000) he adds that awareness is the “ability to determine what is relevant. That ability will include an understanding of systems of dynamics, of relationships between things and people and inevitably some understanding of psychology; awareness also encompasses self-awareness, in particular recognising when and how emotions or desires distort one’s own perception” (Whitmore, 2002: 33).

Therefore, according to Whitmore, awareness helps to build self-reliance, self-belief, self-confidence and self-responsibility. He defines awareness as knowing what is happening around you, and self-awareness as knowing what you are experiencing.

Whitmore discusses his model (input, process, output); this is very similar to the I-coach model (input, throughput, output). He highlights other existential themes besides awareness and responsibility, i.e. involvement and choice (engagement according to Sartre, 1946). Claiming that responsibility is crucial for high performance, he says that “to feel truly responsible invariably involves choice” (Whitmore, 2002: 33). This brings us full circle to Yalom’s (1980) existential concerns of will, choice and freedom.

“Self-belief, self-motivation, choice, clarity, commitment, awareness, responsibility and action are the products of coaching” (Whitmore, 2002: 38).

### 2.44.5 Asking questions

Whitmore rightly says that telling or asking closed questions saves people from having to think; asking open questions causes them to think for themselves. This is in line with Kline’s (1999) thinking environment; if given a chance to think people can sort out their own issues and problems. However most people do not develop their thinking skills; the job of a coach is not only to develop awareness and responsibility inside each of their clients, but also to help them learn how to think for themselves, because the coach will not always be by their side.

John Whitmore defines *effective questions* (2002: 45) as those that compel, focus, describe without judgement and provide a feedback loop for the coach. He makes an interesting claim: “If I am a coach, the answers are of secondary importance” (Whitmore, 2002: 46). In other words, the line of questioning helps develop awareness and responsibility in a client.

Detailing the various types of questions (open, closed questions, interrogative words – what, when, who, how much, how many), he suggests the ‘why’ be discouraged from the coach’s vernacular. Both ‘why’ and ‘how’ can cause analytical thinking rather than observation which can be counter-productive. The ‘why’ questions are better phrased as ‘what were the reasons; ‘how’ questions as ‘what are the steps?’ to evoke more specific factual answers (Whitmore, 2002: 47).

Whitmore says that questions should begin broadly and focus increasingly on detail; questions should follow the train of thought of the client not of the coach. His points suggest a careful linguistic approach, and an attitudinal approach (i.e. how to ask the questions, tone of voice and listening). Themes Whitmore suggests watching out for when asking questions are (Whitmore, 2002: 49-52):

- Avoid leading questions.
- Be attentive to answers.
- Be aware of your tone of voice and the client’s.

- Be aware of body language.
- Reflect back (listen, hear, watch, understand, and the coach to be self-aware).
- Self-awareness might interfere with focusing on the client.
- Transference (projection and transference are the two terms used in psychological distortions; projection means projecting on to, or perceiving in another person, one's own positive or negative traits or qualities; transference is the displacement of patterns of feelings and behaviour, originally experienced with significant figures of one's childhood, to individuals in one's current relationships).
- Counter-transference occurs when the person in authority, manager or coach, himself unconsciously reacts to the transference from his own history by perpetuating the dependence or the rebellion.

Whitmore suggested questions to help the client think aloud (Whitmore, 2002: 52):

- What else?
- If you knew the answer, what would it be?
- What would the consequences of that be for you or for others?
- What criteria are you using?
- What is the hardest/most challenging part of this for you?
- What advice would you give to a friend in your situation?
- Imagine having a dialogue with the wisest person you know or can think of. What would he or she tell you to do?
- I don't know where to go next with this. Where would you go?
- What would you gain/lose by doing/saying that?
- If someone said/did that to you, what would you feel/think/do?

#### **2.44.6 The sequence of questions**

Whitmore has identified two essential concerns of coaching (awareness and responsibility for learning), and he has identified questions as the coach's primary tool. His explanation of the structure of the GROW model and the questions which can be used in each stage are useful for setting goals, and for an understanding of the very basics of a coaching question framework. His rationale behind the GROW model is simply to build awareness and responsibility in the client.

##### **2.44.6.1 Step One: Goal setting**

Whitmore's first questions are related to goal setting for the session:

- What would you like to get out of the session?

- Where do you want to be by the end of our time together?
- What would be the most helpful thing for you to take away from the session?

His opening questions are related to the type of goal (Whitmore, 2002: 59):

- Performance goals (i.e. interim goals that help clients to achieve end goals).
- End goal, which is the final objective – for example, getting a promotion.
- Dream goals (related to personal dreams or visions that ignite action).

He is careful to help the client take responsibility, asking: “How much are you willing to invest in the process?” GROW is about working with the elimination of external and internal obstacles to goal achievement.

#### **2.44.6.2 Step Two: What is the reality?**

Having now defined goals, it is important to clarify the current situation. Whitmore mentions awareness as perceiving things as they really are, and self-awareness as recognising those internal factors that distort one’s own perception of reality. In my model, working with limiting assumptions is working with understanding:

- What are the internal obstacles?
- What are the internal blocks?
- What are the limiting assumptions?

Whitmore suggests the reality questions provide the most straight-forward means of self-assessment. He suggests rarely using ‘how’ and ‘why’ because they invite analysis and opinion; I would add that why invites defensiveness and keeps the client in the conscious thinking process. Whitmore suggests reality questions which emphasise the value of action and the *difference* between action and thinking:

- What action have you taken on so far?
- What were the effects of that action?

#### **2.44.6.3 Step Three: What options do you have?**

The options stage of GROW is not about finding the right answer; it is about creating as many courses of action as possible. Whitmore focuses on the implicit assumptions that people carry around with them – again the arena in which I prefer to work with clients.

He talks about ‘what if’ questions and lists examples of implicit assumptions (Whitmore, 2002: 82-84):

- It can’t be done.

- It can't be done like that.
- They would never agree to that.
- It's bound to cost too much.
- We can't afford the time.
- The competition must have thought of that.

He suggests asking 'What if?' (A typical NLP question of possibility):

- What if you had a large enough budget?
- What if you had more staff?
- What if you knew the answer? What would it be?
- What if that obstacle did not exist? What would you do then?

The Options phase is to stop the client from finding reasons why not to do something; instead to brainstorm options without judgement and to eliminate assumptions that stop the client from achieving what they want to achieve. "Breaking out of these self-limiting assumptions frees us to solve old problems in new ways" (Whitmore, 2002: 84).

I do not believe that the coach should ever offer his or her expertise, but Whitmore suggests it as a possibility when the client has exhausted his or her own possibilities. Some of the questions I have devised for the options phase are:

- What do you really want?
- What are all the different things you could do to achieve it?
- What else?
- What are you willing to commit yourself to?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages?

#### **2.44.6.4 Step Four: What will you do?**

This step moves the client into decision mode with precision and detailed time lines (Whitmore, 2002: 89-90). It is about *will* – what will the client do?

- What are you going to do?
- When are you going to do it? (time frame)
- Will this action meet your goal? (related to the goal)
- What obstacles might you meet along the way?
- Who needs to know?
- What support do you need?
- How and when are you going to get that support?

- What other considerations do you have?
- Rate on a scale of 1 – 10 the degree of certainty you have that you will carry out the actions agreed.

My concern with the above questions is that if the coach isn't highly skilled they are only skin deep; they will not get to the real bedrock assumptions that might be holding a client back from achieving a desired outcome. They seem to be more 'external' questions and are very suitable to performance coaching. They will not necessarily move the client past patterns and behaviours that are being repeated on a continual basis professionally and personally. However, the fundamental principles that Whitmore has focused on with the GROW model are powerful in the coaching conversation, i.e. raising awareness and building responsibility.

#### **2.44.7 What is performance?**

This is a fundamental question raised by the author. Whitmore says "real performance is going beyond what is expected" and "coaching is ... the essential management style or tool for optimising people's potential and performance" (Whitmore, 2002: 97). In his experience, the majority of people aim for intangible goals such as identity, self-esteem, excellence and peak experience.

I would say this is often true, but the client is aligned with a more tangible goal at the same time such as building alliances, building credibility, developing leadership and management competencies, or learning how to handle communication and conflict issues. All the clients in my research project were handling a combination of tangible concerns along with intangibles such as developing self-esteem and self-confidence.

#### **2.44.8 Change is the issue**

Whitmore emphasises that the real job of every effective business leader is change and to make changes that lead to great performance, it is important the coach focuses on "goals, expectations, contexts, actions and learning" (Whitmore, 2002: 102).

#### **2.44.9 Motivation**

Whitmore highlights the mind as the source of self-motivation, and insists that if people are to perform they must be self-motivated. Maslow was important because he broke the mould of exploring pathology to understand human nature; he looked at motivation and at motivators. This fits neatly with my work on limiting assumptions and limiting paradigms.

Whitmore quotes Maslow who said that all we have to do is to overcome “our inner blocks to our development and maturity” (Whitmore, 2002: 110).

The highest state in Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs was the self-actualising person who emerges when: “esteem needs are satisfied and the individual is no longer driven by the need to prove themselves, either to themselves or to anyone else” (Whitmore, 2002: 111). Maslow saw this as a never-ending journey.

This is in alignment with my existential frame of reference: the need associated with self-actualising is the need to develop meaning and purpose. The clients “want their work, their activities and their existence to have some value, to be a contribution to others;” this relates to motivation because “people seek to engage in those activities that help them to meet their needs” (Whitmore, 2002: 112).

In some ways Whitmore’s work seems simplistic as it does not delve beneath the surface of the questions he advocates; this is because he primarily looks at performance without looking at the secondary processes that may be driving the client. This will have an impact on the ability of the coach to explore one level deeper than conscious thought and behaviour to identify limiting paradigms that could be replaced with more empowering paradigms. As I have discovered working with both Best Year Yet (Ditzler, 2001) and the Thinking Environment (Kline, 1999) processes, it takes skill to transform limiting paradigms into powerful new visions.

#### **2.44.10 Self-esteem and coaching for purpose**

This resonates with my coaching model. “Self-actualisers seek meaning and purpose and very often find it by contributing to others in some way” (Whitmore, 2002: 116). In coaching today, clients raise the issue of meaning and purpose in their professional and personal lives. In the endnotes I include Whitmore’s list of questions invaluable for each of the stages of the GROW model that help to develop meaning and purpose in their work.<sup>39</sup>

#### **2.44.11 Coaching for meaning**

*Man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a secondary rationalisation of instinctual drives* (Victor Frankl, 1946). Whitmore highlights a key existential concern Yalom (1980) clearly described, that of meaning and meaninglessness.

Today, a key focus in executive coaching is meaning and purpose. Whitmore mentions that one of the goals of humanistic psychology was the fulfilment “of human potential through self-awareness” (Whitmore, 2002: 119). Goleman cited Maslow as one of the founders of



humanistic psychology to understand and help healthy fully functioning people “gain a deeper insight into human nature” (Goleman, 1995). Whitmore mentions the five domains of emotional intelligence (Whitmore, 2002: 119-220):

1. Knowing one’s emotions (self-awareness)
2. Managing one’s emotions
3. Motivating oneself
4. Recognising emotions in others
5. Handling relationships.

He quotes Elisabeth Denton who defined spiritual intelligence as “the basic desire to find ultimate meaning and purpose in one’s life and to live an integrated life” (Whitmore, 2002: 120). He quotes Danah Zohar from *Spiritual Intelligence* (2001) who says that in business today people are facing a real crisis of meaning. This theme is being carried forward in most of the contemporary coaching literature; many coaches work and integrate meaning in all four quadrants (Wilber, 1997) and work at the levels of IQ, EQ and SQ (rational, emotional and spiritual intelligence) with their clients inside the coaching relationship.

Whitmore says coaching can help people to clear away their defensive shields and self-imposed blockages; and often coaches are coaching their clients through various crises of meaning in their lives (Whitmore, 2002). He makes a salient point that maybe it is better for some businesses to steer away from the complexities of meaning and purpose; however, it is no longer possible as most individuals in the workplace today are looking for meaning and purpose. For the coach this has an impact in how he/she works with the client.

### **2.45 Co-active coaching (Whitworth)**

Co-active Coaching’s Wheel of Life is a holistic circular model which looks at what is working; what is not working (with reference to eight areas of life – career, money, health, friends and family, romance, significant others, personal growth, recognition and physical environment).<sup>40</sup> It was developed by Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl (1998).

An overview of the coaching model in *Co-active Coaching* is in five contexts: listening, intuition, coaching, curiosity, action/learning, and self-management. The three core principles are fulfilment, balance and process. One of the fundamental precepts of this circular model is that it keeps the client accountable and moving forward.

This book details coaching tools for action: “coaching creates a context where people regularly work on the most important issues of their lives” (Whitworth, 1998: xix). The coach is defined as “the person who will help you clarify your goals and provide tools for action” (Whitworth, 1998: xviii). The coach is someone who listens to you without judgement and allows you to show emotion (Whitworth, 1998: xix). The four cornerstones of co-active coaching are:

1. the client is naturally creative, resourceful and whole;
2. co-active coaching addresses the person’s whole life;
3. the agenda comes from the client; and
4. the relationship is a designed alliance.

One of the fundamental principles of the co-active coaching method is that the coach’s job is to ask questions, not give answers. I found this book useful for coaches just setting out into the coaching world, or for coaches who lack formal training. The book details each aspect of the circular model; details questions that can be asked at each stage, and lists questions the coach can ask for various themes listed at the end of the book.

It was this book in fact which made me start to consider the role of the coaching intervention in developing the relationship between coach and client. In this process the coach is always on the edge; dancing in the moment according to Whitworth (a similar phrase picked up by Michael Hall and Michelle Duval in *Coaching Conversations* (2003)).

The relationship is that of a designed alliance (coach/client relationship). The client is empowered by the relationship; and the coaching relationship is more powerful than coach and client individually (Whitworth, 1998: 15).

Whitworth covers important themes in the different stages of coaching; for example, the intake situation has five themes (permission, discovery, designing the future, logistics, providing the client with tools). And questions are delineated for this phase:

- What do you value most in your relationship with others?
- What works for you when you are successful and making changes?
- Where do you usually get stuck?
- What motivates you when you get stuck?
- How do you deal with disappointments or failure?
- How are you about doing what you say you’ll do?
- How would you like me to respond to you as your coach when you get stuck?

All of these are useful questions at the Meta or big picture level. It seems that if change is to be effected, if assumptions are to be uncovered, if transformation is to occur – then it will be at the microscopic level, digging deeper.

What is useful about Whitworth's book is its detailed comprehensive view of the overall coaching experience: clients should experience what it is like to be a 'full' partner with the coach. The coach should be a 'thinking partner' to the client. However, there is no single formula for each stage of the coaching process, but the suggestion of recommended themes works well to match each coach's and each client's individual learning styles.

## **2.46 Coaching conversations (Hall and Duval)**

*Coaching Conversations* (2003) is an excellent example of the many diverse coaching conversations possible, and is written within a neuro-linguistic framework (called neuro-semantic in the context of this book). The authors' definition of a coaching conversation is "every coaching conversation begins in the now and explores future hopes, dreams and visions. It does so by tapping into the learning's, wisdom, experiences and resources of the past" (Hall and Duval, 2003).

Some excellent examples of question models are scattered throughout the entire book. However, each model relates to a specific framework or theme: for example, today's reality, impact of that reality, preferred future, resources, action steps (Hall and Duval, 2003: 225). Themes for coaching interventions listed by Hall and Duval are: explore, probe, challenge, validate, pace, co-creation, new insights, suppositional questions, feedback and challenging behaviours.

Hall and Duval make good suggestions for the coach, such as:

- Stay focused.
- Be in the moment with the client.
- Ask the client powerful questions.
- Hold the higher frames.
- Hold the client's purpose and outcomes.
- Model the authenticity we want to evoke.

However, the most useful interventions were "fierce conversation" and existential questions: they related to how the client is living their life. Questions that were related to direction, meaning, purpose, essence and style (Hall and Duval, 2003: 224-5) were more helpful to the coach in understanding the 'power' in the coach/client relationship.

## **2.47 In conclusion**

Is it the skilful use of positive regard (Rogers) and “being present in the moment” (Kline, 1999) that enables coach and client the opportunity for ‘thinking,’ ‘change,’ and ‘insight’ to happen at varying levels of consciousness?

A recent experience has led me to re-evaluate the balance between the ‘use of questions’ by the coach and the ‘relationship’ between coach and client and how that develops. I and a fellow student demonstrated a very simple coaching process in front of a larger group of 20 students. The coach asked the student three simple questions: what’s working; what’s not working; what if anything can you do differently? The purpose of the demonstration was for observation and feedback on what worked and what didn’t work between coach and client, and how important were the questions.

As it turned out, how the questions were asked, and how attentive and focused the coach was on the client, and the coach’s ability to ‘sit’ with the client in her thinking space proved to be the most powerful part of the process. I interrupted the process several times to turn back to the group to discuss where we were in the process. What I have learned from working with Nancy Kline, is that as long as the client knows explicitly what is to happen (i.e. that you will stop and turn to the audience periodically), the thinker goes right on thinking until you turn back to the conversation between the two of you.

In this three question process the client’s core values start to be uncovered, and there is a lot of cycling and drilling down. The question process allowed a key value, ‘health’, to pop up. As it turned out, it was the crucial value. What allowed the client to courageously explore this value (being held internally but never made explicit in actions, commitment or taking responsibility) was the non-judgemental focus of the coach on the client and staying with the client in the most difficult moments.

So the integration of the question framework with the key components that help to build the relationship seem fundamental to the success of the coaching intervention. The coach helps to create the container or space for the client to feel safe, even when surrounded by twenty fellow students. When compassion, presence, caring, extending yourself, touching the client at a profound level (Yalom, 1980: 4) begins to open the client up to the core issues of existence such as freedom, choice, purpose and values (Yalom, 1980: 19), only then will the question framework allow for the dance to begin.

The coaching conversation, ultimately, seems to be less about the mechanics of the coaching intervention than the art of integrating pure, sheer presence and attention on the client with the skill of asking the right question at the right time. It is about awareness that leads to knowledge

and action; the coaching intervention is simply the bridge between reflection, awareness, learning, knowledge and action.

*Part III explored the contemporary coaching literature for examples of the coaching intervention and question frameworks; I looked at how the contemporary literature has impacted my research project and the development of a coaching model for the coaching conversation.*

*Parts I and II explored the underlying philosophies of experiential learning, existential phenomenology, existential psychotherapy, and other influences on my coaching model such as linguistics, cognitive and behavioural psychology, systems thinking, paradigmatic plurality and cultural competence.*