

## **Chapter 4**

### **Project Activity**

## Chapter 4

### Project Activity

#### 4.1 Structuring the analysis

The intention of this research project was to begin to recognise the specific coaching interventions in the conversation between coach and client, and to identify how the coach's interventions help the client to make breakthrough shifts in thinking, feeling and behaviour – and ultimately in performance. One of the activities throughout the research process was the constant development of the coaching model, which is presented in Appendix 4.

The purpose of the project was to conduct research in relation to what it is that happens, not just in the moment of intervention between coach and client (that moment of change), but what it is that helps to create a transformational shift in thinking, feeling and behaviour on the part of the client as a result of the coaching conversation.

I defined the '*coaching conversation*' as the verbal and non-verbal interaction between coach and client during a face-to-face or telephone coaching session. My specific research is based on face-to-face interactions.

The research was to specifically analyse the coaching intervention in terms of: (a) breakthrough shifts in thinking, behaviour and performance; (b) creating transformational change; and (c) how the coaching intervention helps to build the relationship between client and coach.

#### 4.2 Action research and the phenomenological approach

To approach the analysis I referred back to the action research steps: *planning, acting, observing and reflecting* (Bell, 1993) and reviewed the three steps of the existential phenomenological approach (*epoché*, description, and equalisation).

The rule of *epoché* urges the researcher to bracket all biases *as far as possible* and to approach the research and the client with an open mind. This meant approaching the text as a researcher without assumption or bias. The rule of *description* simply meant for the researcher to describe what was found in analysing the phenomena of the client coaching conversation. The task was not to create a theory, but to describe what emerged from the texts.

The rule of *equalisation* required the researcher to treat every part of the text as having equal value and significance. This gave me, as researcher, a certain amount of freedom in analysing the text from a context, content and linguistic point of view, and secondly from a perspective of emerging themes. The researcher had to try to suspend judgement and be open to whatever might be of most significance to that client.

#### 4.2.1 Inherent problems in the phenomenological approach

The difficulties emerged as I worked with the transcripts: analysing them first with the Ethnograph, then manually going through the hard copy word-by-word for three more levels of analysis. Although it is not possible to be entirely objective all the time, this is the main skill that is required of a coach – and the main skill required of a researcher. It is for this reason that I actually chose this three-step organising model.

As part of using the phenomenological approach, it was important to identify whether it was possible to be impartial, or identify if it is just a role that the researcher plays. It is the same for the coach practitioner; the coach plays the role of being impartial – but what is actually happening inside the coach practitioner's head while in this supposedly neutral role? Chapter 5: Project Findings gives examples of where it was possible, and where it was difficult for the researcher to be impartial when reading the client transcripts. Part of the implication is that as researchers we use our professional knowledge in everything that we are doing, especially when researching.

The following dilemmas emerged: (1) it was not always possible to detect if the coach practitioner was operating from these three perspectives, as the data available were only what the coach practitioner said (not what the coach practitioner thought); (2) the researcher had to try to put aside initial biases, prejudices, opinions and subjective interpretations when reading the text; this was not always possible, as all human behaviour is based on assumptions, and the researcher made certain assumptions when reading the texts.

Phenomenological enquiry is continually oriented back to the beginning, to experience as it is lived. From this position I have analysed the themes and phrases that have emerged from the process of research, and gone back to the 'experience as it is lived,' i.e. the coaching conversation. At that point I have acknowledged the emerging phenomena and eventually identified a developing coaching model.

*In analysing the client coaching transcripts for my research project I have tried to value each part of the coaching conversation, letting the essence of the conversations come through the phenomena (the words and the content). In other words, as researcher I have tried to stay open*

*to all possibilities without making any preconceived conclusions. However, in Chapter 5: Project Findings I discuss the difficulties of bracketing and impartiality in more detail.*

#### **4.2.2 Bracketing and impartiality**

In reflecting on the coaching conversations with C17 (a client who wanted coaching to help her create structure in the way she approaches her daily life and business), the coach/client conversation looked at helping the client to translate her actions and her way of thinking into meaningful experience. The client discovered that she thinks linguistically and kinaesthetically, but that does not help her to structure her day. She decided that she needed to interpret her world differently, i.e. visually, in order to have more meaningful experience and make life work better for her.

When the coach and client constructed a first learning contract at the end of a first session, C17 had as her *purpose*: to learn to structure her thinking differently; as her *strategy*: to use the new way of thinking to move forward; and as *specific outcomes*: (1) to learn to structure her thinking differently, (2) to work with the new way of structuring her thinking, and (3) to journal from pictures into visual language.

In this way, intentionality for C17 would mean that she has constructed a kinaesthetic view of the world and has ascribed meaning to it kinaesthetically and linguistically. She needed to bring in visual thinking to make more sense of her world. The coach and client worked around her limiting assumptions that she could not think visually. That changed on the day when client and coach ‘went down a rabbit hole’ in the coaching conversation. The client was able to visually describe the ‘rabbit hole’ and come out again into the light of the natural world with a visual rather than a kinaesthetic reconstruction.

In the light of these coaching conversations, the researcher could see how the coach was helping the client to interpret her own reality and to see how that client constructs meaning within that reality. There was no indication in the words used by the coach that she was impatient at what could have been interpreted as delaying tactics on the part of the client. Where the researcher could have lost impartiality was when the client went down the ‘rabbit hole’; in other words, seemingly going off-track in terms of the goal of the session. There is a sense here on the part of the researcher that the coach did not lose perspective; hence neither did the researcher. The client achieved her goal at the end of the session – i.e. to identify her avoiding behaviours when trying to think visually.

### 4.3 Action research

Throughout the research process, I tried to continually plan, observe and reflect on my actions. In action research terms (planning, acting, observing and reflecting) the *planning* stage was contracting with clients, planning how to record the conversations, buying the equipment, and hiring the researchers to help with converting files into the Ethnograph (the software programme used to transcribe the individual client sessions into Word files).

The *action* steps were conducting the actual coaching conversations, recording them, taking notes during the sessions, making post-session notes by hand or dictation, transcribing the sessions into Word files, downloading the Word files into the Ethnograph, creating the Ethnograph files, and finally conducting the analysis.

The *observation* stage was recording the entire research process as I proceeded, both in my journal and beginning to write up the project stage by stage. I first wrote up the introduction and methodology chapters, followed by the literature review which analysed the literature read and studied during the course of the project. This review included a detailed exploration of my developing coaching model, a review of question frameworks in contemporary literature as this reflected my research into the coaching intervention; and a review of the impact of existentialism, phenomenology, psychotherapy and coaching literature on my work. Finally, I wrote up the project activity, the project findings, and the project conclusions and recommendations.

This part of the project required all four steps of action research: *planning* the timing and the write-up of the thesis; the *action* steps included sending the draft thesis to my advisor for comments and conferring with colleagues on how the thesis should be structured; and I constantly had to *observe* and *reflect* on the process as the write-up proved to be the most difficult stage. In fact, I edited and cut out 50 per cent of the writing; then cut it by one-third again. The appendices include material relevant to each chapter, and the final reflections are in Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations. Timing was my most constant opponent; the writing of the thesis took several more months than I had initially anticipated.

### 4.4 Client undertaking

Clients knew about the research project, and they knew that they were being taped as contracted. While naturally this variable could influence my findings, I do not believe this is so, as is also borne out by the final interviews. I believe that the final interviews answer the question about one of the classic problems with qualitative research, and with ethnographical approaches such as participant observation: does people's awareness that they are being

studied influence their behaviour, so that they fashion their responses accordingly? Would they behave and react in the same way if they were not aware of being observed?

Although this does not seem to have been a problem, it is important to have clarified it both during the research and in the final interviews. This is one of the generic problems with ethnography and qualitative approaches.

#### **4.5 Preparation for analysis**

The preparation to begin the first stage of analysis was very time consuming; it involved me, the clients, and two of my research assistants. The first steps were to contract with the clients for up to 12 hours of coaching sessions (in one- and two-hour segments); buying the recording and transcribing equipment; recording each conversation; transcribing the recorded transcripts into Word files; converting the Word transcripts into the Ethnograph software programme; and creating a project file for each coaching conversation in three computers (my laptop, desktop and one researcher's computer). One researcher's computer was used to create the Ethnograph files which were then transferred to my laptop; the mainframe computer kept copies of all data for security and back-up.

We created three Ethnograph files for *each* transcript: a coach's intervention file, a client text file, and a marked up or 'coded' file of conversation themes and coach interventions. After coding the text line-by-line for themes during the first reading it became clear that I would need to read through the hard-copy text word-by-word, line-by-line, for the second, third and fourth levels of analysis. These analyses required writing the new code words by hand on the empty right-hand side of the page, rather than inserting them above the line as accomplished by the Ethnograph in the first analysis. (It would have been necessary to recreate new Ethnograph files for the second, third and fourth analyses). Reading and coding the texts in the second, third and fourth analyses proved to be more time-efficient, practical and effective. The third and fourth readings were to determine the dominant client themes and coaching intervention themes to emerge from all the texts.

The Ethnograph (in the first analysis) numbered each line of text in each individual coaching session, and aligned all text to the left side of the page; this meant that space on the right side of the page could be used for coding and commentary in each subsequent reading. This meant in turn that all subsequent hard copy readings were very easy. This first Ethnograph coding is included in Section 4.19.

To discover how the coaching intervention helps to create change at the level of thinking, feeling and behaviour - and ultimately how that impacts on the client's performance - it was critical to absorb content, context, structure and meaning in each of the coaching sessions. This required reading painstakingly through the 'hard' copy in the second and third stages of analysis (once the first stage was completed, line-by-line, on the computer using the Ethnograph coding system). The fourth and final reading was a reading for broader themes. The third and fourth readings helped to develop the final existential coaching model.

#### **4.6 The clients**

Below I list the clients as they have emerged throughout the entire research project. As I work in South Africa, which is sometimes known as the 'rainbow nation', I aimed for diversity of language, background, profession, physical location and ethnicity. I code-named each client as the project evolved, from C1 (client 1) to C14 (client 14). In the final analysis I selected six clients from the original 14 clients who had their transcripts taped (C1, C2, C3, C5, C6 and C14).

A further three clients (C15, C16 and C17) were my most challenging executive clients whose conversations were not taped. I selected one client (C15) to compare my session notes against the research client transcripts to see what I had learned about the coaching conversation. For C15, C16 and C17 I kept detailed coaching session notes and dictated post-session reflections. I selected C15 as the one client whose notes I would compare against the six in my dominant sample. I was primarily looking for types of coaching interventions and similar broad client themes.

With clients C1-C14, I taped all their sessions and selected those that had the best recording quality. I took copious notes during each session, as well as making post-session reflection notes. For clients C15, C16 and C17 I took notes during the coaching sessions, made post-session notes, and dictated my reflections; these reflections were subsequently transcribed into Word files. The reason for doing this was to compare the coaching model with these clients, and to ensure I had one pilot client against whom I could compare for data that had not been transcribed. This was to test the relevance and usefulness of the transcriptions. Below I give a brief description of each client. There were nine female, and eight male clients. If the client speaks more than one language I list their dominant language followed by the secondary language:

- C1 Female, bilingual Afrikaans- and English-speaking, senior news editor.
- C2 Male, English-speaking, executive leadership coach, lecturer, author.
- C3 Female, English-speaking, CEO of a national events organisation.

- C4 Male, bilingual English- and Afrikaans-speaking, CEO, entrepreneur, South African engineering company.
- C5 Male, English-speaking, international professional golfer.
- C6 Female, English-speaking, training consultant, business woman.
- C7 Female, English-speaking, business owner, training and education field.
- C8 Male, English-speaking, entrepreneur/CEO catering and special events organisation.
- C9 Female, multi-lingual, business owner, education development specialist.
- C10 Male, English-speaking, director in catering and events organisation.
- C11 Male, English-speaking, business coach, qualified lawyer.
- C12 Female, bilingual English- and Afrikaans-speaking, regional government official.
- C13 Male, English-speaking, entrepreneur, leadership training.
- C14 Female, bilingual Afrikaans- and English-speaking, chairperson of a large non-governmental organisation (NGO) and a former anti-apartheid activist.
- C15 Male, bilingual, MD of a large international IT company.
- C16 Female, English-speaking, board director for a large retail chain, international.
- C17 Female, English-speaking, entrepreneur and large family business owner.

#### **4.7 Preparing the client recording sessions**

In order to prepare each client file for analysis I spent nearly 18 months on preparatory work. The first stage was contracting with clients who were prepared to be part of my research project. That took three months. The second stage was to buy a recording machine which would enable me to record the coach/client sessions. My first machine was an ordinary small Dictaphone with a recording device and a foot pedal transcribing device. I soon realised that it would not be possible for me to do the transcriptions myself; it takes eight hours to manually transcribe one hour of recorded tape.

The very first researcher that I employed for the project was R1 (Researcher 1), an SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) television researcher with whom I had worked on a television programme promoting coaching for entrepreneurs in South Africa. R1 spent two years listening to and selecting the best quality tapes. Finally, together we picked the six best-quality client tapes whose data were analysed. Only one client (C14) was not in the original sample.

In the beginning of the project most client sessions were taped in my office where I run my coaching practice. One of the reasons it was possible to record so many clients is that clients often request tapes for their coaching sessions; although transcripts were only created for the



six clients selected for the final project. Several clients (C1, C3, C8, and C14) were recorded in cafés or hotel foyers when we met there.

#### **4.8 Problems encountered**

Each session was recorded, with the necessity to change the tapes every 30 minutes. This could be distracting to the client but I developed quite a lot of skill in changing tapes surreptitiously. The anxiety was always whether the tapes would be audible. My researcher and I tried various speeds of taping. The greatest difficulties presented themselves with my softer-spoken clients. C7 spoke too softly, which was upsetting as her issues were of considerable interest. However, her voice did not transcribe well, and I had to choose not to use her material in the project. It may prove useful for the book I plan to write in 2006, but I did not feel the tape recordings were complete enough for this research project.

Another difficulty that did not become apparent until 18 months into the project was that the recording equipment was corrupted sometime during the first year of the project. Over 100 hours of client sessions were too muted to hear, or the sound that emerged was simply garbled. Unfortunately, the transcribing researcher (R1) was ill for a number of months in the middle of the project, thus we only discovered the corrupted files at the beginning of the third year.

At that point I bought new digital taping equipment. This was very useful for about four months. It soon wore down, and with my last client (C14) many of the coaching sessions did not record well. We discovered that, although there were various settings for the recording (conference or dialogue), some clients spoke too softly to successfully record their voices. I have learned much about recording equipment during this research project. Although I bought what I thought was excellent-quality equipment, in future I would alternate recording equipment and service all equipment regularly.

#### **4.9 Reflections on recording issues**

The main learning was that I should have recorded only six clients. Instead I recorded the sessions from all 14 clients, and then selected the best six to transcribe. This meant a great deal of time was spent in deciding which client tapes were good enough quality to transcribe. One of the reasons for continuing to record clients who wished tape recordings was to ensure we had enough material at the end of the project. I wanted to ensure that I would have enough text for analysis, particularly if anyone dropped out of the project.

#### **4.10 Using the Ethnograph**

The coaching conversation consists of the client's discourse, the coach's interventions and the relationship that develops. My dilemma was how to use both the Ethnograph (computer software to analyse data for structure, patterns and meaning) and several subsequent hard-copy analyses of each transcript. I realised that for the first level of analysis the Ethnograph was very useful as it laid out the text on the left side of the page and numbered each line of text for easy access.

Questions that arose as I set out the Ethnograph files in preparation for the first level of analysis were:

- How exactly can I structure the analysis of the data using Spinelli's three steps, i.e. bracketing assumptions, describing not explaining, treating everything the client says as having equal value and significance?
- Are there specific coaching questions or themes I should look for?
- Are there certain words to be looked for?
- How can the researcher be clear about the essence of each conversation?
- When analysing the text how can I use the three steps effectively (époque, description, equalisation)?
- How can I keep an awareness of my four action research steps (planning, acting, observing and reflecting)?

#### **4.11 The Ethnograph and the first level of analysis**

I performed the first level of analysis using the Ethnograph which enabled me to number each line, to name the types of interventions, and to create a code book of words, phrases, patterns and themes as they emerged from first to final analysis. The themes reflected two specific things: the coach's interventions, and the themes that arose from the clients' text. The layout of the Ethnograph transcript allowed me to create and review the codes in a separate file; the code book of themes emerged with the first analysis of each client file (in other words, with the first analysis of each individual coaching session). Secondly, I was able to constantly review and evaluate the code against my evolving coaching model.

The mark-up file from the Ethnograph analysis lists the type of client theme or coaching intervention, lists the line numbers in the text, and refers to either the client file (clt) or the coach's (cch) file. The client's text was analysed first and put into a client file; the coach's interventions were analysed second and put into a coach's file. The mark-up file listed all coach interventions and client themes by their selected code names and combined findings

from both coach and client files (mark-up file examples are included at the end of Appendix 6). Each individual coaching session had its own unique set of codes, and a number of pages for the mark-up files; the mark-up files were from one to 14 pages long. We created the mark-up files for an easy 'at-a-glance' view of the codes which had emerged from each coaching session.

#### **4.12 Second, third and fourth levels of analysis**

The code book grew with each subsequent reading (second, third and fourth) of the coaching session text. The code book eventually became two specific lists: client themes and types of coaching interventions (including themes which were similar to the client's themes). To conduct the subsequent readings I printed out and bound the coaching transcripts from all six clients; five were from the original research project and were selected based on the quality and quantity of the recordings available. I wanted at least six hours of transcribed text from each client.

The second and third analyses were completed manually reading the hard copy, highlighting text and making notes on findings. The fourth reading was to look for the strongest themes to emerge from all texts. This reading identified three specific themes that had emerged from previous readings: existential issues, experiential learning, and the development of the relationship between coach and client.

Observations from each reading were recorded on the hard copy of each coaching session, with new code words recorded as they emerged. All reflections were then typed up in draft form to be included with this chapter.

One drawback from this phenomenological investigation is that no priority is placed on any texts, or any reading. This meant that an equal amount of time had to be spent on each reading (one, two, three and four).

#### **4.13 Triangulation – conversation about the conversation**

To conclude the project, I had a final interview with each client; I asked each client to read all of their own transcripts. The final interview was to hear their reflections on the coach/client conversations, to determine the authenticity of the sessions, and to hear their learnings from the process overall. One of my supervisors, Dr. David Lane (Middlesex University, London) suggested that in analysing the data it is important to continue to re-investigate, refining and reporting all observations.

The three components of the research project have been to (1) conduct and tape the coaching conversations; (2) transcribe and analyse the data from an existential phenomenological point of view via computer software and hard copy; and (3) interview the clients once they had read the transcripts for a further perspective on the coaching conversation.

This final component of the research project was: *firstly, to ask the client for their reflections on the coaching sessions having read the transcripts; secondly, to ask where they see that a change, a shift, a cognitive insight or an ‘a-ha!’ moment occurred; and thirdly, to find out what they think brought about changes in thinking, feeling, behaviour which ultimately impacted on their performance.* The questions were:

1. What are your thoughts or reflections on reading the transcripts?
2. Where did you see a change, a shift, an insight or an “a-ha!” moment?
3. What do you think brought about changes in thinking, feeling or behaviour for you; and how do you think that impacted on subsequent performance in the workplace or at home?
4. What made the difference to you?
5. Tell me how that made you feel?
6. What would you pick as the crucial moment when you saw something that helped you to stay with that experience in the coaching conversation?

#### **4.14 Evidence produced**

Because this is a working doctorate, the research is based on work in progress (i.e. the conversations between coach and client in an existing coaching practice). One of the requirements of the programme is to produce ‘evidence’ as a result of the project.

The evidence presented as a result of this research project are: (a) an existential executive coaching model which can be used professionally and taught at academic level; (b) a code book of client themes and coaching interventions; (c) an outline for a new book on coaching to be written in 2006 and published in 2007; (e) a doctoral thesis which reports the findings of the research project.

Other by-products of the research project have been the development of two academic coaching programmes designed and delivered for The Coaching Centre (Cape Town)’s foundation and advanced level certificate programmes (CIPC and DIPC); a lecture on the 10 components of the Nancy Kline thinking process to be delivered at the ASTD (American Society for Training and Development) in 2006; several published articles on coaching; a book chapter on *The History of Coaching*; and the spearheading of COMENSA (Coaches and

Mentors of South Africa) as a requirement for the project to establish ethics and standards for coaches in South Africa.

#### **4.15 Ethical and legal considerations (organisational/professional context)**

One of the first concerns in setting up this research project was the question of ethics. At first I decided to work within the ethical code of the EMCC until COMENSA developed an ethical code for South Africa. In fact, one of my projects during this research process has been to encourage and lead the setting-up of COMENSA.

Spearheading the setting-up of this organisation has stimulated my learning in terms of ethics and standards. This process has been instrumental for me to begin to understand the depth of the ethical issues not only in South Africa but for coaching and mentoring worldwide.

#### **4.16 Client's text (overall themes to emerge from the first analysis)**

In the beginning, one of my research assistants (R2) and I created an Ethnograph file for each client coaching session; we then conducted the first stage of analysis using the transcribed Word file. What this meant, is that for each coaching client conversation, the Ethnograph was used to layout the first reading of that file. Subsequent readings were from hard copy.

##### **4.16.1 First client text code book – using the Ethnograph**

As R2 and I began to read through (on-screen) the first coaching sessions for the client conversations, a series of words, patterns and themes began to emerge. The questions and interventions on the part of the coach teased out these client themes. We created a first 'book' of code words or themes that emerged from the clients' texts. These were:

*ability, adapt, amazing, analogy, anger, anxiety, awareness, awesome, background, bad, being, brilliant, bullied, busy, challenge, challenges, change, chat, choice, closure, collapse, commitment, communicate, communication, compassion, confident, conflict, connect, control, decision, develop, disempower, do/change, emphasis, empower, enjoy, exactly, excited, experience, explain, failure, fascinating, fears, feelings, forward (change), frustrated, fulfilment, goal, going back, good point, great, grow, guide option, health, honesty, I get it, I know, I will, I'm sure, impact, important, insight, instead, integrity, interest, is working, learning (empower), make sense, manipulate, money, motivation, need (change), neurotic, no more, normal, openness, opportunity, perfect, possibility, process, proud, question, realised, reflection, relationship, relax, repetition, repress, resolve, respect, responsibility, self-esteem,*

*should, sleep, stood up, stress, strong, success, summarise, suppressed (impact), technique, thank you, tired, true, understand, values, very, victim, worry, yes, you.*

#### 4.16.2 Client's text (conclusions of the first level of analysis)

This first level of analysis, analysing all client texts for client themes and coaching interventions (included in one list together), was quite a lengthy process. Together my researcher (R2) and I completed the first level of analysis on each of the client's files, creating the first Ethnograph code book (Section 4.19).

When I was ready to complete the second level of analysis, I reread each text for second themes, listing them to the right side of the page (this included client themes and coaching interventions). When I began the second analysis, I realised that I should continue this activity, adding to the code book with each level of analysis. In Section 4.21 is the list of code book *client themes* and *coaching interventions* as they have grown collectively from all four analyses.

#### 4.16.3 Client's text (conclusions to the second level of analysis)

I read through each of the manuscripts, handwriting the new codes as they appeared (for client themes and coaching interventions). I completed this for all clients (one client at a time, one manuscript at a time). Finally, I wrote up the second analysis themes, including any new themes that appeared as a result of this second analysis, for both client themes and coaching interventions.

#### 4.16.4 Client themes (second hard-copy analysis)

In the *second* manual analysis of the clients' Ethnograph files, specific overall themes emerged in the clients' conversations which were (new themes are highlighted in italics):

*ambiguity, action, anxiety, assumptions, awareness, background, believe, change, choice, communicate conflict, conscious, consequences, confrontation, decision, defensive, empower, encourage, enjoy, existential angst, existential decision, fear, freedom, humour, issue, leadership, meaning, motivation, possibility, power, realised, responsibility, resistance, self-confidence, self-doubt, self-esteem, self-recognition, stood up to, stress, strong, thanks, tired, worry, unconscious, understand, unsure, victim, visualise, working.*

#### 4.16.5 Client themes (third hard-copy analysis)

In the *third* hard-copy analysis, rather than start to look for new themes, I read for the dominant themes in each of the texts:

awareness, self-reliance, self-belief, self-confidence, self-responsibility, clarity, choice, freedom, motivation, decision, commitment, change and performance.

#### **4.16.6 Client themes (fourth hard-copy analysis)**

In the *fourth* and final hard-copy analysis the themes to stand out were the themes which created the final coaching model:

reflection, responsibility, goals, change, freedom, meaning, choice, anxiety (also being, becoming, doing).

#### **4.17 Coach's interventions (first analysis)**

The types of words that emerged in the coaching interventions from the first level of analysis were:

*ability, analogy, anxiety, awareness, background, being, challenge, challenges, change, chat, commitment, communicate (check in), communication, compassion, conflict, connect, control, decision, disempower, do/change, empower, explain, failure, feelings, fulfilment, goal, going back, good point, great, grow, guide, guide option, health, honesty, impact, important, insight, interest, learning, money, need, opportunity, possibility, question, reflection, relationship, relax, repetition, respect, responsibility, stress, summarise, technique, understand, worry, yes.*

##### **4.17.1 Coach interventions (code book first analysis)**

The code book grew with each level of analysis for each client coaching session. The interventions which were most helpful to the coach from the first analysis (in helping the client to think, reflect, and gain insight) were:

*challenge, change, chat, do/change, empower, explain, goal, going back, good point, guide, listening, insight, question, reflection, summarise.*

During the entire research process the researcher added new client themes, and new coaching interventions, to the code book, which seems to be becoming a reference guide for a coach practitioner.

##### **4.17.2 Coach's interventions (code book second analysis)**

*Second (hard-copy) analysis*

In the second hard-copy analysis the key new themes to emerge were:

*acknowledgement, back to you, checking, clarify, confirmation, create safety, do differently, empathise, empowering action, encourage, EQ or emotional intelligence, fees, hang on/stick with that, humour, meaning, menu, negative insight, power, relationship building, recommend, sharing, shift, suggestion, teach, tell me more, think, will, wondering.*

Different types of questions to emerge were questions:

*for action, to ascertain, to ask for limiting assumptions, to build confidence, to challenge, to change, to clarify, to confirm, to confirm goals, for a decision, direct questions, to empower, to encourage growth, re existential issues, for information, to lead to insight, to query, to reframe, to reframe and repeat to confirm, to restate, to summarise, to think, to understand.*

Part of the project activity was to define each of the different types of coaching interventions as they emerged, and to add them to the code book. These coaching interventions are a distillation of the interventions discovered after the second analysis of each client's transcripts. In Chapter 5: Project Findings I give the detail of the findings from each client's overall transcript analyses.

Each of the coaching interventions discovered in first and second analyses have been defined and added to the final code book in Section 4.21. In order to keep a methodical record of the emerging coaching interventions, it was useful to define the majority of interventions that the coach actually used to intervene in the client's narrative as they arose.

#### **4.17.3 Third analysis (model development)**

The third and fourth analyses were reading the clients' texts for a third and fourth time — not necessarily to elicit new client themes or new coaching interventions. The third and fourth readings were looking to identify the broader themes that might be emerging from the texts. These readings helped the coach to finalise the development of her model. In the third reading the overall coaching intervention themes to emerge were those of the key stages of the coaching conversation:

1. reflection and awareness (insight);
2. responsibility assumption (commitment);
3. setting goals and taking action (choice); and
4. personal growth and change (i.e. learning).

#### **4.17.4 Fourth analysis (model development)**

In the fourth analysis the researcher re-read all of the client transcripts and identified the overall structure of the model as: the development of the *relationship* between client and



coach; *experiential learning* on the part of the client both inside and outside the coaching conversation; and the *existential* issues of:

1. freedom and existence;
2. meaning and becoming;
3. choice and doing; and
4. anxiety and being.

#### **4.18 In conclusion**

Chapter 5: Project Findings lists detailed results from each client file for the four levels of analysis. The first analysis with the Ethnograph (see Section 4.19) identified client themes and coaching interventions to emerge from all client files; a description of the first and second analysis coaching interventions are provided in Section 4.20.

In the second analysis, the researcher began to enlarge and modify the code book of client themes and to identify specific coaching interventions (for example, types of questions and interventions).

From the third and fourth analyses the dominant themes of the evolving coaching model became apparent, with four clear stages to the coaching intervention (reflection and awareness, taking responsibility, setting goals, and personal growth and change), plus three clear themes that created the structure of the conversation, i.e. the relationship, experiential learning and existential issues.

The researcher was able to finalise the stages of the existential coaching model: she first completed the sketches of the model as they emerged, and finally put them into a PowerPoint file (Appendix 4) to show the development of the model from the beginning to the end of the research project.

##### **4.18.1 A multiplicity of interpretations**

In this analysis, existentialism is related to phenomenology, where openness and an attitude of wonder will allow the specific circumstances and experiences to unfold in their own right. In analysing the data, I have let themes and patterns emerge (i.e. coaching interventions and client themes). As these phenomena have occurred I have attempted to remain as free as possible from personal assumptions, bias and pre-judgement about the significances and meanings in the texts (i.e. coaching transcripts).

As a researcher, this phenomenological approach aligns with my approach to client coaching conversations. Clients put their own meaning, their own interpretation, onto their own personal experience, their thinking, and the events that happen to them. If we ‘bracket’ our assumptions as a researcher, there is no right or wrong. From a phenomenological point of view, there is only the interpretation that we give to thinking, to events, and to things of significance that happen to us.

Husserl asked, “Whose Reality is truly real? Whose interpretation is the real one ... our conclusions are relative – based as they are upon a number of socio-cultural variables. Ours is a phenomenal Reality, and as such, it remains open to a multiplicity of interpretations” (Spinelli, 1989: 4).

#### **4.19    *Ethnograph computer samples from first analysis***

The Ethnograph (in the first computer analysis) numbered each line of text in each individual coaching session, and aligned all text to the left side of the page; this meant that space on the right side of the page could be used for coding and commentary in each subsequent reading. This meant in turn that all subsequent hard copy readings were very easy.

This first level of analysis, analysing all client texts for client themes and coaching interventions (included in one list together), was quite a lengthy process. Together my researcher (R2) and I completed the first level of analysis on each of the client’s files, creating the first Ethnograph code book. This first Ethnograph computer coding is included in the following pages.



















## **4.20 The Ethnograph – first computer and second hard-copy analyses**

### **4.20.1 Coaching interventions and client themes (first computer analysis)**

Below, listed alphabetically, is a description of each of the coaching intervention themes from the first on-screen reading as coded with the Ethnograph and second hard-copy reading:

#### *Challenge:*

This code is used at times when the coach is challenging the client.

#### *Change:*

This comes up often in the form of a client theme, particularly when the coach asks what ‘if anything’ can the client do differently that will make a difference or solve a problem. It does not always come up with the word ‘change’ in the conversation; it is often more subtle and emerges in the form of insights, new perceptions, new goals and changed thinking, feeling and behaviour.

#### *Chat:*

These are paragraphs where the client and coach are engaging in friendly chatting that is not directly linked to the session. These sequences were important as they set the tone for the session. I think that one of the great strengths of these sessions is the very personalised nature of the interactions. The coach seems to know everything about the client’s life, like a friend, and the clients respect that.

#### *Do/Change:*

Asked by the coach either to think about action steps, or to enquire what the client could do differently next time. This is asking the client what kind of changes would make a difference.

#### *Do differently:*

Refers to questions asked by the coach to help the client think outside of their normal worldview or paradigm.

#### *Emotion:*

This is the client’s expression or articulation of feelings, whether positive or negative. According to Longman’s Dictionary of the English language: a strong feeling (for example, anger, fear or joy) usually involving physiological changes.

*Empower:*

The coach is nudging the client into a more positive direction, or the coach is saying something to support the client, to reinforce the client's positive self-image.

*Explain:*

The coach is explaining a concept or question more fully to the client. These explanations are important for two reasons. Firstly, the coach often needs to make sure that the client understands a question, concept or technique before they can proceed with the session. Secondly, the coach often will take time to explain what is actually happening in the session. The explanation of questions asked also provides the client with time to formulate an answer.

*Feelings:*

Similar to Longman's Dictionary of the English language: *an emotional state or reaction, and susceptibility to impression or sensibility.*

*Goal:*

These are passages relating to goals. They include long- and mid-term goals out of session and also short-term goals within the session.

*Going back:*

These are times when the coach actively redirects the conversation in a direction that she feels is important. Sometimes they are places where the coach is calling attention to a specific area that must be addressed.

*Good point:*

This is simply an acknowledgement on the part of the coach to recognise, acknowledge or agree with the client. It is an aside, usually to indicate that the coach is with the client in terms of his/her thinking and feeling.

*Guide:*

These are segments where the coach is asking a very difficult question and seeks to help the client without putting words in their mouth. This is accomplished by offering the client several, similar options and allowing them to choose one and embellish it on their own.

*Insight:*

Insights that the client has about him/herself and others; as well as insights offered by the coach about the client and others.

*Listening:*

This is a core skill for the coach and often she lets the client know she is listening by the way she keeps silent when they are speaking, to the way she asks questions, summarises, reframes, reflects or rephrases what the client has said. She also uses techniques such as ‘going back’ to let the client know she hasn’t forgotten important points or issues to be discussed. Listening is one of the primary skills to build rapport, a safe thinking environment and the relationship.

*Question:*

*Rhetorical* questions which provoke thought and insight; *genuine* questions which require answers and thus force the client to verbalise partially formed insights and also facilitate the making of plans for the future; *challenging* questions which ask the client to think more honestly or in depth about a subject. These questions are extremely important, because they put the responsibility on the client to continue the conversation, but still allow the coach to guide the session. They also permit the coach to check and see if she has understood something directly. As the analysis continued with further readings, different types of questions emerged.

*Reflection:*

This is a very important technique. The coach asks questions in such a way that the client can think, feel or probe more deeply into an issue or a topic. Often clients do not know how to reflect, and it is a skill that the coach acquires in action. It indicates a high level of listening ability in order to reflect back, reframe, rephrase or simply summarise what the client is saying in the form of a *statement* or a *question*. Often the coach thinks of different ways to help clients to reflect, from journaling to how the review is done at the beginning and end of each coaching session. Throughout the session the coach reflects back to the client to help with insight or to clarify an issue or to show understanding and interest.

*Reflect and summarise:*

This indicates a high level of listening ability in order to reflect back, reframe, rephrase and to follow that with a simple summary of what the client is saying in the form of a statement or a question.

*Reframe:*

This is a specific neuro-linguistic technique to help the client see, view, think, or feel about an issue differently. The coach restates what the client has said, but frames it in different language and with a different perspective. The purpose is to evoke the client’s creative thinking and feeling processes, and is often used to help identify and replace disempowering assumptions, paradigms or worldviews. Often reframing is used to separate fact from emotion, and to offer up another interpretation of a situation.

*Summarise:*

This happened frequently throughout the sessions to summarise each part of the conversation before moving into another stage, and finally to conclude a session with insights, questions, and actions before (often) writing up the final summary onto the learning plan (with vision, strategy and goals).

**4.20.2 Coaching interventions (second hard-copy analysis)***Acknowledgement:*

This is when the coach acknowledges something the client has said, recognises a goal achieved or a recent success.

*Back to you:*

The coach brings the client back to a previous subject because the conversation may have veered off from a difficult subject.

*Checking:*

This is when the coach asks a question, or frames a statement like a question, or simply queries something the client has said. It can be said as a challenge to what the client is saying; it can be simply asking for information; or it can be digging a bit deeper to really help the client understand an issue or gain an insight.

*Clarify:*

The coach is asking a question or querying something the client says, either to more fully understand it herself, or to help the client to gain insight or self-knowledge.

*Confirmation:*

Here the client is confirming or acknowledging something the client is saying, or confirming agreement with a thought, feeling, or action on the part of the client. This can be to build self-confidence or to simply let the client know that coach and client are 'on the same page'. It helps to build rapport.

*Create safety:*

The coach is speaking in such a way, either to confirm confidentiality, or perhaps in a softer tone of voice to create rapport with the client – ultimately with the idea of creating a 'safe thinking environment' in which the client can speak freely without feeling judged, knowing the conversation will stay in the room between coach and client.

*Do differently:*

This is a common question asked by the coach to query what can be done differently, either as a result of something that has not worked, or from an insight about thinking, feeling or behaviour that is not working for the client, or as a result of the conversation between coach and client where the client has had an ‘a-ha!’ or an insight, or the client has turned around a limiting assumption into a more empowering one. This is looking for change and to summarise.

*Empathise:*

This is the when the coach lets the client know verbally and non-verbally that she can see an issue from their point of view. It is different to sympathy: the coach tries to verbalise or rephrase the client’s words to show she really understands how they think or feel.

*Empowering action:*

This is more to do with the coach’s language than actually using the phrase ‘to empower action’ with the client. It is the result of a question, a summarising of action points agreed, or even challenging a limiting assumption made by the client. The coach’s job is to empower action on the part of the client, supporting the client in whatever way is needed. That may be coming up with an action plan, problem solving, or simply acting as a thinking partner.

*Encourage:*

The coach uses this technique in a number of different ways: to give confidence to the client to keep talking about an issue, thought or feeling that is difficult to articulate or discuss; to give time to the client to dig deeper to find a disempowering assumption or paradigm that might be holding the client back; or simply to help the client think outside the box, or outside their normal zone of comfort in terms of thinking, feeling or taking action.

*EQ or Emotional intelligence:*

The coach refers to EQ (emotional quotient), emotional intelligence, or emotional wisdom. This is a technique to help the client understand the importance of feelings in generating powerful thinking patterns, and also to help the client understand the importance of emotion in the workplace. The coach often explains the concept of EQ to clients and recommends texts for the client to read.

*Existential issues:*

Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasises the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. Existential philosophy regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for one’s acts. Key existential issues raised by clients are anxiety, purpose and meaning, and choice.

*Fees:*

This is under coach's intervention as it is a reference to part of the contracting with the client in terms of time, fees and method of coaching. The coach explains fees at the beginning of the coaching contract, but also whenever any questions about fees or pricing comes up. Pricing can be difficult for the client if they are not responsible for payment (for example, the employing organisation is responsible); and often payment terms play a crucial role in the length of time of the coaching relationship. Handling this topic well is important for building rapport with the client and helping the client to feel well catered to; it is a matter of professionalism for the coach to handle it well. It can be a moot point, or it can determine whether the coaching starts, and how long it continues.

*Hang on/stick with that:*

This refers to the coach suggesting that the client stay with a point, an issue or a topic before moving on to the next point. Clients often want to move on quickly, or gloss over a difficult point, or even have so much to say they cannot get it out quickly enough before moving on to another issue. This intervention allows the coach to step in and slow the client down, to reflect and think about the point that has come up. If the client says "No, I want to move on", the coach will agree after checking the client's reasons for wanting to move on.

*Humour:*

This can be a humorous intervention, an aside, a joke or a story told to create a shift in tone for the coaching conversation, or it can simply be a rapport-building measure. It can also be because both client and coach are so relaxed with each other they can tease each other slightly. Humour is definitely needed to lighten some coaching conversations as the issues can be difficult for both coach and client. Humour is used by both coach and client.

*Meaning:*

This theme is brought up by both client and coach. The client often comes round to 'what is the meaning of this job, the meaning of my life, what is my purpose in being here' at some point during the contracted coaching sessions with the coach. It can emerge at any stage of the coaching process, but most often emerges once the relationship has been formed and there is trust between coach and client.

*Menu:*

This term is often used by the coach. In the beginning of the session the coach asks "What's on the menu today?" In other words, what are the issues of the day that present themselves to discuss or resolve. The coach often refers to 'menu' at the beginning of the second stage of the coaching conversation (throughput) when she is asking the client to prioritise the issues for



discussion; and finally to summarise at the end of the session the coach asks the client to summarise thoughts, feelings and actions from the menu of topics discussed that day.

*Negative insight:*

This is when a client has an insight about something they are viewing negatively, and gain an insight about what may be holding them back in terms of thinking, feeling or taking action – and how it may impact on their well-being and ability to perform.

*Power:*

This theme emerges from both client and coach. It can be that the client is feeling disempowered due to circumstances; or it can be the coach intervening to ask questions about the power issues that the client is facing; or the coach can be explaining some of the dynamics in organisations around power.

*Relationship building:*

This is a common reference from this particular coach as many of her clients ask how they can work on building alliances and relationships in the workplace. Questions around this topic will help the client to think about how they may resolve conflict with a colleague or loved one, communicate more effectively with their team, or simply how to network and build support within their working community.

*Recommend:*

The coach suggests or recommends a particular action or goal. The coach will do this with good intention and will be careful not to step in with something the client can think of for him/herself. This will be based on the coach's experience or expertise that may be useful at this point; not to share expertise as is done in mentoring, but to call on the coach's experience – usually to suggest reading a text that may complement a new learning, or to help the client think about a new way to approach a situation, or how to say something differently to a colleague or boss in a conflict situation.

*Sharing:*

This is a technique used by the coach to help build rapport. It may be at the start of a coaching session where ice is being broken, a safety zone being created, or simply to set the scene before delving into the issues for the day.

*Shift:*

A term used by the coach to indicate that there has been a change, an insight, a new perspective; or it can be used to query whether such a shift is needed.

*Suggestion:*

This is similar to recommendation. The coach suggests or recommends a particular action or goal. The coach will do this with good intention and will be careful not to step in with something the client can think of for him/herself. This is not to share expertise as is done in mentoring, but to call on the coach's experience — i.e. to suggest reading a text that may complement a new learning, help the client think about a new way to approach a situation, or it could quite simply be how to say something differently to a colleague or boss in a conflict situation.

*Teach:*

If a client specifically requests to be taught a specific technique (they may be a coach themselves); or asks how can they quickly learn to do something technical (such as read a budget spreadsheet) or learn a specific skill (such as a sales or communication technique). The coach will take time out during the session to teach that particular point to the client by explaining it, perhaps even demonstrating then asking the client to teach the coach back.

*Technique:*

A specific intervention which can be described by name, such as role-playing, third-position thinking, doing a Best Year Yet session, or using the Nancy Kline thinking skills questions for a session. The coach is always very explicit with the client about how the session is structured, and explains any techniques used. Clients often want to use a technique with their team, or in their consulting or coaching practice.

*Tell me more:*

This is the coach's way of indicating interest and asking the client to go into more depth with their story; also a way to keep the client on track with a particular issue.

*Think:*

The coach often talks about 'thinking' and even explains that the coach is a thinking partner to the client. The coach will make clear the distinction between thinking and feeling and the need for emotional wisdom in making decisions.

*Values:*

The coach often starts an early session of coaching with values to help the client learn how to set goals, explaining that goals need to be set in alignment with individual and organisational values. Working with values helps clients to understand conflict and stress situations.

*Will:*

The coach will often ask the client, “Will you do that and if so when?” to gain commitment to a goal. Will is linked to motivation as explained in Chapter 2: Terms of Reference and Literature Review.

*Wondering:*

The coach often says, “I’m wondering ...” leading towards insight on the part of the client. Wondering allows the coach to go back to the key issue.

### 4.20.3 Client themes (second hard-copy analysis)

In the *second* manual analysis of the clients’ Ethnograph files, specific overall themes emerged in the clients’ conversations which were (new themes are highlighted in italics):

*ambiguity, action, anxiety, assumptions, awareness, background, believe, change, choice, communicate conflict, conscious, consequences, confrontation, decision, defensive, empower, encourage, enjoy, existential angst, existential decision, fear, freedom, humour, issue, leadership, meaning, motivation, possibility, power, realised, responsibility, resistance, self-confidence, self-doubt, self-esteem, self-recognition, stood up to, stress, strong, thanks, tired, worry, unconscious, understand, unsure, victim, visualise, working.*

## 4.21 Final code book of coaching interventions and client themes

### 4.21.1 Coaching interventions

*Acting as if:*

An NLP technique; helping the client to ‘act as if until they assume the part’; helps the client to gain confidence.

*Accountability:*

Asking the client for accountability and what responsibility they should take.

*Acknowledgement:*

This is when the coach acknowledges something the client has said, recognises a goal achieved or a recent success. To acknowledge can be to empower or to acknowledge an idea.

*Advice:*

This can be simply a suggestion from the coach to the client; or it can be suggested action. It is often the result of an insight or reflection that the client has had.

*Advice re communication:*

For example, “just say...,” making a suggestion of how the client can express something assertively, calmly, without conflict.

*Affirming client:*

The coach either acknowledges something the client is saying or has accomplished; or recognises a shift in thinking, feeling or behaviour.

*Analogy:*

Often used by the coach to compare stories, situations, concerns or issues and to highlight a specific point.

*Anchoring:*

The process of anchoring involves linking a specific sight, sound or touch with an experience that is present. The coach may select a situation in which the client is associated to either reproduce that thought, feeling or perspective. This process enables the client to use the anchor to re-access the same experience. The ability to use anchors is an NLP technique that enables the client to: access feelings and thoughts that they want when they want them; replace unwanted feelings and thoughts with desirable ones; gain control over their emotions; influence the response they trigger in other people; and tap into their memory and imagination.

*Apology:*

The coach ‘models’ being able to accept when she is wrong by apologising when she does get something wrong.

*Appreciation:*

This is a Nancy Kline technique, and is often used by the coach at the end of a session; the coach appreciates a quality about the client, and *vice versa*.

*Assumption:*

The coach asks questions to clarify if the client is working to an assumption, and if so asks questions to determine if it is an empowering or limiting assumption.

*Asking a question back:*

This is a specific technique to ask the client to think more carefully about the issue, and to help them take responsibility for the thinking and reflection.

*Back to you:*

When the coach is bringing the client back on track as the conversation may have veered off from a difficult subject.

*Being tough (what are you going to do about this?):*

The coach challenges the client.

*Bracket:*

Putting aside all previous assumptions, judgements and previously formed opinions and listening with a completely open mind.

*Browbeating:*

Browbeating is a symbolic term here, meaning something more akin to ‘scolding’. This may refer to the client ‘browbeating’ someone else, or the coach ‘browbeating’ the client about goals not achieved.

*Challenge:*

This code is used at times when the coach is challenging the client (for example, to make a decision: can I just challenge your thinking about; my question is whether you have to; can I just; how will you; how do you; what is stopping you from).

*Change:*

This comes up often in the form of a client theme, particularly when the coach asks what if anything can the client do differently that will make a difference or solve a problem. It does not always come up with the word ‘change’ in the conversation; it is often more subtle and emerges in the form of insights, new perceptions, new goals and changed thinking, feeling and behaviour (for example, what is the change for you; is there a change in how you feel?).

*Chat:*

These are paragraphs where the client and coach are engaging in friendly chatting that is not directly linked to the session. These sequences were important as they set the tone for the session. I think that one of the great strengths of these sessions is the very personalised nature of the interactions. The coach seems to know everything about the client’s life, like a friend, and the clients respect that. Chat is often to build the relationship.

*Checking:*

This is when the coach asks a question, or frames a statement like a question, or simply queries something the client has said. It can be said as a challenge to what the client is saying; it can be

simply asking for information; or it can be digging a bit deeper to really help the client understand an issue or gain an insight.

*Choice (existential):*

Existential choice refers to a decision which relates to the fundamentals of life and being. An example would be whether to accept responsibility for a situation rather than feel a victim.

*Clarify:*

The coach is asking a question or querying something the client says, either to more fully understand it herself, or to help the client to gain insight or self-knowledge.

*Comparing (for learning):*

This is where client (or coach) examines the similarities or differences of one thing to another. Sometimes this is done to clarify decision-making; at other times it is simply to rationalise a choice made.

*Concern:*

Concern relates to a matter up for consideration arising through a personal tie or relationship; it can indicate (according to the Longman Dictionary) an *uneasy state marked by interest, uncertainty, or apprehension*.

*Confidentiality (whatever happens here will stay here):*

Part of a coach's code of ethics is to honour confidentiality in the coaching conversation. There will be a contracted agreement between client and coach about what is communicated to superiors in the working environment; this confidentiality must be agreed to and honoured at all times. The client entrusts the coach with confidences, and must feel safe to do so.

*Confirmation:*

Here the client is confirming or acknowledging something the client is saying, or confirming agreement with a thought, feeling, possible goal, rationale for a goal, an idea or action on the part of the client. This can be to build self-confidence or to simply let the client know that coach and client are 'on the same page'. It helps to build rapport.

*Contracting:*

When client and coach work together, they enter into a verbal and/or a written contract which specifies the parameters and boundaries of their work together. They may sign a document which contains the terms and conditions of their work together; and/or they may re-contract verbally each time they meet.

*Create safety:*

The coach is speaking in such a way, either to confirm confidentiality, or perhaps in a softer tone of voice to create rapport with the client – ultimately with the idea of creating a ‘safe thinking environment’ in which the client can speak freely without feeling judged, knowing the conversation will stay in the room between coach and client.

*Do/change:*

Asked by the coach either to think about action steps, or to enquire what the client could do differently next time.

*Demonstration:*

The coach offers to help the client say or do something new (i.e. let me show you how).

*Do differently:*

Refers to questions asked by the coach to help the client think outside of their normal worldview or paradigm. This is also a common question asked by the coach to query what can be done differently, either as a result of something that has not worked, or from an insight about thinking, feeling or behaviour that is not working for the client, or as a result of the conversation between coach and client where the client has had an ‘a-ha!’ or an insight, or the client has turned around a limiting assumption into a more empowering one. This question is looking for change and can also be to summarise.

*Empathise:*

This is where the coach is letting the client know verbally and non-verbally that she can see an issue from their point of view. It is different to being in sympathy; the coach tries to verbalise or rephrase the client’s words to show she really understands how they think or feel.

*Empower:*

The coach is nudging the client into a more positive direction, or the coach is saying something to support the client, to reinforce the client’s positive self-image.

*Empowering action:*

This is more to do with the coach’s language than actually using the phrase ‘to empower action’ with the client. It is the result of a question, a summarising of action points agreed, or even challenging a limiting assumption made by the client. The coach’s job is to empower action on the part of the client, supporting the client in whatever way is needed. That may be coming up with an action plan, problem solving, or simply acting as a thinking partner.

*Encourage:*

The coach uses this technique in a number of different ways: to give confidence to the client to keep talking about an issue, thought or feeling that is difficult to articulate or discuss; to give time to the client to dig deeper to find a disempowering assumption or paradigm that might be holding the client back; or simply to help the client think outside the box, or outside their normal zone of comfort in terms of thinking, feeling or taking action.

*EQ or Emotional intelligence:*

The coach refers to EQ (emotional quotient) or emotional intelligence, or sometimes emotional wisdom quite frequently. This is a technique to help the client understand the importance of feelings in generating powerful thinking patterns, and also to help the client understand the importance of emotion in the workplace. The coach often explains the concept of EQ to clients and recommends texts for the client to read.

*Empowering assumptions:*

These are the new assumptions that the client chooses to work from; usually they are created as a result of identifying and turning around limiting assumptions.

*Existential issues:*

In existentialism, there is no essence before existence. In other words, all human beings must create their own meaning for their own lives. There is no given meaning and therefore clients can find themselves in a crisis when decisions have to be made that may have a fundamental impact on their lives. For existential phenomenologists we are free to choose the meaning of our lives.

*Existential decision:*

This may be a decision taken that is grounded in the experiences of the client. It is a decision that reflects inquiry into the client's experience of themselves in relation to the world, especially with reference to their personal *freedom, responsibility, and isolation and the experiences (for example, of anxiety and despair)* in which they make their decision (italics from Longman Dictionary).

*Explain:*

The coach is explaining a concept or question more fully to the client. These explanations are important for two reasons. Firstly, the coach often needs to make sure that the client understands a question, concept or technique before they can proceed with the session. Secondly, the coach often will take time to explain what is actually happening in the session. The explanation of questions asked also provides the client with time to formulate an answer.



*Explain and guide:*

This is often when a client is lacking information and needs gaps filled in their knowledge; or if the coach is asking questions to help the client think comprehensively around an issue or concern.

*Explore:*

The coach asks questions to explore all of the options and possibilities around an issue.

*Fees:*

This is under coach's intervention as it is a reference to part of the contracting with the client in terms of time, fees and method of coaching. The coach explains fees at the beginning of the coaching contract, but also whenever any questions about fees or pricing comes up. Pricing can be difficult for the client if they are not responsible for payment (for example, the employing organisation is responsible); and often payment terms play a crucial role in the length of time of the coaching relationship. Handling this topic well is important for building rapport with the client and helping the client to be taken care of, and it is a matter of professionalism if the coach handles it well. It can be a moot point, or can determine whether the coaching starts, and how long it continues.

*Giving information:*

Similar to explain and guide; often the client has a gap in knowledge, and the coach can provide a piece of information or an insight.

*Goal/goal setting:*

These are questions and statements which relate to clarifying and setting goals. They include long- and mid-term goals out of session and also short-term goals within the session. Types of goals: aspirational, possible, goal strategy, future goals. Questions may be asked such as: how would you define your goal; what is your goal?

*Going back:*

These are times when the coach actively redirects the conversation in a direction that she feels is important. Sometimes they are places where the coach is calling attention to a specific area that must be addressed (for example, so the last thing; to the menu; let's see what we've got so far).

*Guide/guiding/guidance:*

These are segments where the coach asks a difficult question and seeks to help the client without putting words in their mouth. This is accomplished by offering the client several,

similar options and helping them to choose one and embellish it on their own [*guidance; guide (so you can do); guiding; gut feeling*].

*Hang on/stick with that:*

This refers to the coach suggesting that the client stay with a point, an issue or a topic before moving on to the next point. Clients often want to move on quickly, or gloss over a difficult point, or even have so much to say they cannot get it out quickly enough before moving on to another issue. This intervention allows the coach to step in and slow the client down, to reflect and think about the point that has come up. If the client says “No, I want to move on”, the coach will agree after checking the client’s reasons for wanting to move on.

*Humour:*

This can be a humorous intervention, an aside, a joke or a story told to create a shift in tone for the coaching conversation, or it can simply be a rapport building measure, and it can also be because both client and coach are so relaxed with each other they can tease each other slightly. Humour is definitely needed to lighten some coaching conversations, as the issues can be difficult for both coach and client. Humour is used by both coach and client.

*Ideas:*

This is when the coach is helping the client to explore ideas that may lead to new thinking, new feeling or new behaviour.

*Insight:*

Insights that the client has about him/herself and others; as well as insights offered by the coach about the client and others. For example, the coach may ask a question that is helping the client ‘look for insight’.

*Interrupting the client:*

The coach may interrupt the client (as long as the relationship is strong enough to withstand this) to get a point across or to bring the client back on track. For example: listen to me; let’s go back to.

*Learning:*

The coach often asks what the client has learned in the session so far, at the end of the session, or as a result of trying out a new behaviour.

*Learning plan (vision, strategy, outcomes):*

The coach at the end of most sessions helps the client to summarise learnings, actions and new goals set as a result of the session. This is reviewed and written up in a learning plan which details the client's vision, strategy and outcomes for the next few weeks.

*Limiting assumptions (turning around):*

The coach asks a question to help the client identify a thought, perspective, attitude or mindset that is stopping the client from seeing something clearly, that may be holding the client back, or that may be getting in the way of a client making a decision. The coach simply observes and asks the questions reference limiting assumptions; the coach never decides that it is a limiting assumption that the client must turn around. It is up to the client to confirm something is limiting or stopping them from going forward; the coach simply makes the observation or asks the question (for example, what are you assuming that is stopping you from ... ).

*Listening:*

This is a core skill for the coach and often she lets the client know she is listening by the way she keeps silent when they are speaking, to the way she asks questions, summarises, reframes, reflects or rephrases what the client has said. She also uses techniques such as 'going back' to let the client know she hasn't forgotten important points or issues to be discussed. Listening is one of the primary skills to build rapport, a safe thinking environment and the relationship.

*Make/making a decision:*

This refers to the coach helping the client to reflect and think about decisions that need to be changed, or new ones to be made based on reflection, evaluation and learning. This often leads to discussing commitment and how the client will commit him/herself to the decision.

*Meaning:*

This theme is brought up by both client and coach. The client often comes round to 'what is the meaning of this job, the meaning of my life, what is my purpose in being here' at some point during the contracted coaching sessions with the coach. It can emerge at any stage of the coaching process, but most often emerges once the relationship has been formed and there is trust between coach and client.

*Menu:*

This term is often used by the coach. In the beginning of the session the coach asks "What's on the menu today?" In other words what are the issues of the day that present themselves for us to discuss or resolve? The coach often refers to 'menu' at the beginning of the second stage of the coaching conversation (throughput) when she is asking the client to prioritise the issues for discussion; and finally, to summarise at the end of the session, the coach asks the client to

summarise thoughts, feelings and actions from the menu of topics discussed that day (for example, what do you want to talk about today; what would you like to work on today; what was it you thought you needed help with; why are you here).

*Metaphor:*

The coach often uses a picture word, a metaphor, or metaphorical story to illustrate a point.

*Negative insight:*

This is when a client has an insight about something they are viewing negatively, and gain an insight about what may be holding them back in terms of thinking, feeling or taking action – and how it may be impacting on their well-being and their ability to perform.

*Observation:*

The coach simply observes something the client has said or done; an observation can be an insightful perspective on client thinking, behaviour or performance.

*Pacing and matching:*

This is an NLP technique and simply requires the coach to match the client's verbal and non-verbal behaviour in such a way that it creates rapport. To slow a client down, or speed up the tempo, the coach begins to increase or decrease their verbal and non-verbal behaviour to set a new pace.

*Perceive/perception:*

The coach asks the client questions about how they perceive a situation, another person or themselves. It is to lead to an insight about thinking, feeling or behaviour.

*Power:*

This theme emerges from both client and coach. It can be that the client is feeling disempowered due to circumstances; or it can be the coach intervening to ask questions about the power issues that the client is facing; or the coach can be explaining some of the dynamics in organisations around power.

*Pushing:*

The coach pushes the client a bit further (for example, 'I just think ...').

*Query (checking):*

Often a question by the coach to clarify understanding, to check it is what the client really meant to do or say.

*Question:*

*Rhetorical* questions which provoke thought and insight; *genuine* questions which require answers and thus force the client to verbalise partially formed insights and also facilitate the making of plans for the future; *challenging* questions which ask the client to think more honestly or in depth about a subject; *goal-setting* questions; *probing* questions which probe for information, understanding, to challenge or simply bring something into the conscious awareness of the client. These questions are very important because they put the responsibility on the client to continue the conversation, but still allow the coach to guide the session. They also allow the coach to check and see if she has understood something directly. As the analysis continued with further readings, different types of questions emerged: *confirmation and summarising* questions about actions, goals, decisions, choices, challenges, thinking and final strategy; *what* questions help the client to consider an idea, a thought or an issue differently.

*Types of questions to emerge were:*

for action, anything else; to ascertain, to ask for limiting assumptions (what would hold you back; what is holding you back; what do differently; how do it differently;  
 what might you be assuming; what might you be assuming that is stopping you from);  
 asking a question back; to build confidence, to challenge (what I want to know is; what are you doing; can you actually; but what else; so what you're telling me is; can we talk about how you do that; what are you going to do to manage this so that it doesn't happen again); for change, challenging decisions (tell me about that)  
 to challenge (quietly; but what's your learning);  
 to check; checking (so what you have said to me);  
 to clarify (what do you mean; re client content;  
 closed questions (are you; can I ask you what happens; can I stop you; can we just; do you want to; is this; is that from; is that important; is there ever an answer; so it's not just)  
 to confirm; (so you are saying; so what you're telling me is); to confirm action/goals, to confirm understanding; for a decision, digging deeper (anything else), did you find that useful,  
 direct questions, to empower, to encourage growth, existential decisions; existential issues; re feeling (need to see how often feelings come up); re goals; how would you define your goal; what is your goal; re going back (can I ask you just before we move on; I want to talk to you about; just tell me more about; let's look at this again; let's go back to; hang on/wait a minute; so you were talking about goals);  
 direction (do you want to);  
 how will you (+ verb);  
 how (how can I help you the most with this; how come);  
 for information, information (to strengthen the case); for insight; insightful question; key criteria; to lead to insight; re learning (so what is the learning for you in terms of what you are

going to do differently; what did you get out of today); re letting go; re limiting behaviour; re menu; re mental management; re money; re need; re possibility; to query, to reframe, to reframe and repeat to confirm, to rephrase/restate, to summarise; re our work together; re outcomes; overturning limiting assumptions; probing; probing (digger deeper about client or someone else),

probing (so you + verb),

probing (have you, what else),

probing (and the reason for this is),

probing for client to reflect (is it because of);

query [for information and understanding (for example, so the other thing to think about is)],

question direction (do you want to);

question for client to reflect (which you didn't know about)

question (pushing),

repetition,

rephrase (so what you are telling me is),

rephrase and reframe (so in other words),

restatement to confirm,

review and summarise,

should you (+ verb),

so the key thing is,

so what you are telling me,

so what can you (+ verb),

suggestion (do you want to think about; you might just want to think about; why don't we look at),

suggestion with reflection (it's one thing to and another thing to)

suggestion (let's look at the little picture),

suggestion (what you might want to think about is),

suggestion (why don't you write that down),

suggestion (you need to pay attention to this),

summarise (what did we do),

summarise action and reflections (what have you gained from today),

re survival; tell me more,

tell me,

timing [when are you (+ verb)],

to think, to understand; we need to think about,

to understand;

what; what are; what can you (get other people to do for you),  
 what changed; what's changed as a result; what's different  
 what could you do differently,  
 what do you need to ask,  
 what do you think, what do we need (+ verb),  
 what do you think is going to happen,  
 what do you think it would be helpful to do,  
 what does this mean to you,  
 what are the emotions, what are you feeling  
 what have you learned from this,  
 what if it didn't happen,  
 what is it that's different,  
 what is it you are doing (digging deeper),  
 what is it that I can help you with,  
 what might you like to think about,  
 what would be the difference (probing), what is the bigger picture,  
 what would you like to work on today (menu);

what's holding you back; what's stopping you;  
 what happened (tell me the story); what changed; what gained; what learned; when do you  
 think you will (+ verb), when is it that you (+ verb), when is it you need to (+ verb),  
 when will you (+ verb),  
 when do you (+ verb)  
 who are the people, who delegate to, who is (+ verb),  
 why (for information),  
 why are you (+ verb),  
 why do you + verb,  
 why (understanding),  
 wondering (I wonder/I'm wondering),  
 worry (what is it you're worried about).

*Recommend:*

The coach suggests or recommends a particular action or goal. The coach will do this with good intentions, and will be careful not to step in with something the client can think of for him/herself. This will be based on the coach's experience or expertise that may be useful at this point; not to share expertise as is done in mentoring, but to call on the coach's experience. It is usually to suggest reading a text that may complement a new learning; it could be to help the

client think about a new way to approach a situation, or it could quite simply be how to say something differently to a colleague or boss in a conflict situation.

*Recognition:*

This is similar to acknowledgement, and may simply be to recognise something the client has said or is thinking, or to praise the client for something achieved.

*Reflection:*

This is a very important technique. The coach asks questions in such a way that the client can think, feel or probe more deeply into an issue or a topic. Often clients do not know how to reflect, and it is a skill that the coach acquires in action. It indicates a high level of listening ability in order to reflect back, reframe, rephrase or simply summarise what the client is saying in the form of a statement or a question. Often the client thinks of different ways to help clients to reflect, from journaling to how the review is done at the beginning and end of each coaching session. The coach reflects back to the client to help with insight, or to clarify an issue, or to show understanding and interest.

*Reflect and summarise:*

This indicates a high level of listening ability in order to reflect back, reframe, rephrase and to follow that with a simple summary of what the client is saying in the form of a statement or a question.

*Reframe:*

This is a specific neuro-linguistic technique to help the client see, view, think, or feel about an issue differently. The coach restates what the client has said, but frames it in different language and with a different perspective. The purpose is to evoke the client's creative thinking and feeling processes, and is often used to help identify and replace disempowering assumptions, paradigms or worldviews. Often reframing is used to separate fact from emotion and to offer up another interpretation of a situation.

*Relationship building:*

This is a common reference from this particular coach, as many of her clients ask how they can work on building alliances and relationships in the workplace. Questions around this topic will help the client to think about how they may resolve conflict with a colleague or loved one, communicate more effectively with their team, or simply how to network and build support within their working community. If the relationship is strong enough to withstand it, the coach can interrupt the client's conversation to ask a question, come in with a tough challenge, or simply to clarify.



*Repetition:*

The coach repeats a question or statement letting the client know that she wants to explore this point more.

*Rephrase (I think you want to say); rephrase and reflect back; rephrase and suggest:*

*Restatement/restatement to query:*

The coach restates or rephrases something the client has said in order to clarify understanding or to make it more explicit to the client; or the coach restates something the client has said in order to query it and have the client dig a bit deeper.

*Review and summarise:*

This could be at the end of a session, or during the session, to review where client and coach are in terms of the menu of issues, or in the light of a concern they are in the middle of exploring.

*Sharing:*

This is a technique used by the coach to help build rapport. It may be at the start of a coaching session where ice is being broken, a safety zone being created, or simply to set the scene before delving into the issues for the day.

*Shift:*

A term used by the coach to indicate that there has been a change, an insight, a new perspective; or it can be used to query whether such a shift is needed.

*Sounds like:*

This is often a phrase the coach uses as another way of restating, rephrasing or clarifying.

*Strategy:*

This often refers to writing up the learning plan at the end of a session where client and coach identify the client's vision, strategy (how to achieve the vision) and goals or outcomes which are a result of that coaching session.

*Suggestion (suggest action or options):*

This is similar to recommendation. The coach suggests or recommends a particular action or goal. The coach will do this with good intentions, and will be careful not to step in with something the client can think of for him/herself. This will be based on the coach's experience or expertise that may be useful at this point; not to share expertise as is done in mentoring, but to call on the coach's experience. It is usually to suggest reading a text that may complement a

new learning, it could be to help the client think about a new way to approach a situation, or it could quite simply be how to say something differently to a colleague or boss in a conflict situation. The coach may also be suggesting working with a topic that has arisen, for example: let's work with this; you might just want to think about; why don't we look at. For example, I think you could have; so I would have thought; think for a minute; you could; what I would; why don't we.

*Summarise/ summarise action:*

This happened frequently throughout the session to summarise each part of the conversation before moving into another stage, and finally to conclude the session with insights, questions, and actions before (often) writing up the final summary onto the learning plan (with vision, strategy and goals). Other examples are: summarising to confirm; summarising and repeating (technique); making a statement to confirm.

*Teach:*

If a client specifically requests to be taught a specific technique (they may be a coach themselves); or asks how can they learn quickly to do something technical (such as read a budget spreadsheet) or learn a specific skill (such as a sales or communication technique). The coach will take time out during the session to teach that particular point to the client by explaining it, perhaps even demonstrating then asking the client to teach the coach back.

*Technique:*

A specific intervention which can be described by name, such as role-playing, third-position thinking, doing a Best Year Yet session, or using the Nancy Kline thinking skills questions for a session. The coach is always very explicit with the client about how the session is structured, and explains any techniques used. Clients often want to use a technique with their team, or in their consulting or coaching practice. Examples of techniques are circle of excellence, ABC, the Best Year Yet 10 steps, or Nancy Kline's six-stage thinking environment questions.

*Tell me more:*

This is the coach's way of indicating interest and asking the client to go into more depth with their story. It's also a way to keep the client on track with a particular issue.

*Think:*

The coach often talks about 'thinking', and even explains that the coach is a thinking partner to the client. The coach will make clear the distinction between thinking and feeling and the need for emotional wisdom in making decisions.

*Third-position thinking:*

This is a technique the coach uses to help the client physically stand in first position (their position); second position (the other's position); third position (that of coach) in order to resolve a conflict or see the other person's point of view.

*Tough challenge:*

The coach is making a particularly tough statement, asking a particularly tough question, rhetorical or specific, to ensure the client doesn't avoid an issue or move off track if it is something important to discuss or resolve.

*Turning around limiting assumptions:*

The coach asks questions to help the client identify and replace limiting assumptions with more empowering assumptions. See notes on Nancy Kline process in Chapter 2.

*Values:*

The coach often starts an early session of coaching with values to help the client learn how to set goals, explaining that goals need to be set in alignment with individual and organisational values. Working with values helps clients to understand conflict and stress situations.

*Vision:*

This may refer to questions asked by the coach to help the client think about a future vision for themselves and their team, or it may refer to the writing up of the learning plan at the end of a coaching session with vision, strategy and next-step goals.

*Visualising:*

This is a technique to help the client visualise the past or future.

*Will:*

The coach will often ask the client, 'will you do that and if so when?' to gain commitment to a goal. Will is linked to motivation as explained in Chapter 2: Terms of Reference and Literature Review.

*Wondering (I just wondered; I wonder):*

The coach often says, "I'm wondering ..." leading towards insight on the part of the client. Wondering allows the coach to go back to the key issue.

#### **4.21.2 Client themes (final code book)**

action; ability, achievement, achieving, activity, adapt, advice; admission, advising, amazing, aha!/insight, ambiguity, analogy, anger; angry, angst, anxiety, appreciate; arrogant, asking for advice, aspirational goal; assumptions; attention, awareness, awesome;

back to you; background (the story); bad; balance, being (who I am); becoming; believe; big issue; blaming; bored, boundaries; brilliant; bullied; building an idea; building relationships; business driven, business women; busy;

career transition; challenge/s, change, change and meaning; chat (building rapport and relationship); choice; clarity; closing the deal; closure; coaching helps/works; collapse; comfort zone; commitment, commitment with resistance; communicate, communicate conflict; compassion; complain; complete; complexity; concern; confidence; confidence building; confident; confirmation; conflict; confrontation; confusion; connect; connection; conscious; consequences; consolidate; constructive/critical (paradox); contingency plans; control; counselling; creativity; critical voice;

debate; decision/decisive; defensive; dejected; delegation; demotivated; denial; depressed; desired goal; develop; dialogue; differences; difficult; disempower, disappointment; disempowering paradigm (my 5th hole is my nemesis hole); diversity; do/doing; doubt; dreaming; dreaming (giving up the dream); driven;

emotion; emotional; emotional intelligence; emphasis; employ; empower; empowering assumption; encourage; energy; engaging; enjoy; ethics; exactly; excited; existential angst; existential decision; experience; explain, excuse;

failure; fascinating; fear/fears; feelings, feeling disempowered; felt strongly; finish; focus; forward; free spirit; freedom; frustration; fulfilment; fun;

get clear; glass ceiling; goal/goals/goal setting; grow /growing; guilty; grow; guidance;

health; honesty; humour;

idea; I get it; I know; I will; I'm sure; I'm very clear; impact; important; improvisation; inner dialogue/inner voice; insight; instead; integrity; interactive; interest; is working; issue;

journey;

key insight (I mustn't fight this anymore); knowing;

lack of freedom; lack of self belief; languaging; leaders; leadership; learning; learning from experience; life experiences; limiting assumptions (I often think I'm not good enough); leadership; lifestyle; low self-esteem;

make sense; manage; meaning; making a decision; male vs. female; manipulate;  
 master/mastery; measured change; mental power; mental problem; mentor; mindfulness;  
 money; motivation; motivated by change/freedom;

natural development; need; negative language for a positive thought (there is no doubt in my  
 mind that I can't be a champion); nervous; neurotic; no; no confidence; no decision; no more;  
 normal; not possible; noticing;

observation; openness; opinion; options; opportunity; outputs;

paradox: confidence and edgy; passionate; perfect; performance; personal mastery; planning;  
 position; positive; possible goal; possibility; power; powerful women; practical experience;  
 preference; pressure; prices (fees); process; professional; projection; proud;

real insight; realised; realisation; rebel; recommendation; reflection (that's the thing we need  
 to address); relationship; relax; repetition; repress; resentful; resentment; resistant; resistance;  
 resolved; resources; resistance (I don't want to change); responsibility; revelation;  
 role/strategy;

self-affirmation; self-belief; self-confidence; self-doubt; self-esteem; self-management; self  
 observation; self-realisation; self-recognition; self-reflection; self-reliance; self-value; self-  
 understanding; self-worth; sensitive; shifting perspective; should; significance; sleep; standing  
 my ground; states of being; stepping stone; stood up to; story; stress; striving; strong;  
 struggling; success; suggestion; summarise; support; survival; system;

teach; technique; tense; thanks; thank you; think/thinking; tired; thinking; transition; true;  
 trust;

unconscious; understand; unsure;

value/values; very; victim; vision; visualise; visualising;

way of being; women; working; worry; writing;

yes; you.

### **4.21.3 Client theme definitions (final code book)**

#### *Challenges:*

These are things that challenge or impede the client.

*Chat:*

Informed chat or when the client and coach are engaging in friendly chatting that is not directly linked to the session. These sequences were important as they set the tone for the session. I think that one of the great strengths of these sessions is the very personalised nature of the interactions; the coach seems to know everything about the client's life, like a friend, and the clients respect that.

*Emotion:*

This is the client's expression or articulation of feelings, whether positive or negative. According to Longman's Dictionary of the English language: emotion is a strong feeling (for example, anger, fear or joy) usually involving physiological changes.

*Feelings:*

Similar to Longman's Dictionary of the English language: *an emotional state or reaction, and susceptibility to impression or sensibility.*